



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 6th, 2025

HB1423

**Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System –
Establishment
Judiciary Committee
Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of **House Bill 1423**. The Maryland Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

The Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System is established to study and address the disparate treatment of African Americans, Hispanics, and other non-White individuals within Maryland's criminal justice system. The Commission is tasked with analyzing systemic inequalities, identifying key areas for reform, and providing recommendations to address racial disparities. The Commission's findings and recommendations are to be reported by September 1, 2026, ensuring a structured approach to tackling inequities in law enforcement, sentencing, incarceration, and judicial practices.

From a Catholic social teaching perspective, this initiative upholds the principles of human dignity, solidarity, and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. The Church calls for just and fair treatment of all individuals, particularly those who are marginalized or oppressed. Systemic racial disparities in the criminal justice system violate the fundamental moral principle of equality before God and undermine the common good. By seeking to correct injustices and ensure equal protection under the law, this Commission advances the pursuit of justice and reconciliation in society.

At the community level, addressing racial disparities in the criminal justice system has profound implications. Families and communities of color have long faced disproportionate policing, harsher sentencing, and systemic barriers to rehabilitation and reintegration. This Commission's work can lead to policy changes that promote fairness, reduce recidivism, and rebuild trust between communities and law enforcement. Equitable justice policies ensure that all individuals—regardless of race or background—receive the same protections, opportunities, and dignity under the law.

From a policy standpoint, the establishment of this Commission is an essential step toward rectifying long-standing racial injustices and fostering a more equitable criminal justice system. A fair justice system strengthens the moral fabric of society, ensures that punishment is

proportionate and rehabilitative rather than excessively punitive, and creates pathways for true restoration and reintegration. Maryland can lead in the pursuit of justice by enacting meaningful reforms that reflect the ethical responsibility to uphold human dignity, fairness, and the common good for all citizens.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference urges a favorable report on **House Bill 1423**.