



March 11, 2025

**HB 1326
Prekindergarten Savings Account Program – Establishment**

House Ways and Means Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of House Bill 1326. The 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. There are more than 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland.

House Bill 1326 would expand educational options for lower and middle-income Maryland students through the provision of education savings accounts for prekindergarten. Accounts would be funded by the state on a quarterly basis. Funding for prekindergarten would be provided on a sliding scale based on family income levels, with greater funding for lower-income individuals.

Affording parents and students expanded educational options can help to alleviate some of the burden our public schools, particularly in the vast expansion needed to provide prekindergarten to all Maryland students. The provision of prekindergarten utilizing private providers is a highly economical way to expand high-quality prekindergarten. With the state's ambitious prekindergarten expansion goals hampered by cost, private providers could be utilized at a cost savings to the state. Many private providers and nonpublic schools educate students at a vastly lower cost than the state per pupil average. Some Catholic providers have participated in state prekindergarten expansion for several years, providing prekindergarten to four-year-old children whose family income is 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) or lower. Catholic schools and other providers have the capacity to offer high quality seats at our programs and stand at the ready to partner with the state of Maryland in that endeavor.

All three of (arch)dioceses serving Maryland have a strong commitment to education and recognize the important role that kindergarten-readiness plays in a child's educational development. Within the State of Maryland, there are approximately 120 prekindergarten programs in Catholic schools or parishes, in addition to Headstart programs. Nearly all are accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by MSDE and a vast majority of them employ state-certified prekindergarten teachers. Many are EXCELS level three, four and five-rated. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report for House Bill 1326.