



Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

**Responding to the cry of the Earth
and the cry of the poor.**

Hearing before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Maryland General Assembly
February 24, 2026

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)
of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on
SB 719, Sewage Sludge – Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances – Regulation**

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based upon, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation and respect for all life. MCCH is a grassroots voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics. In the 2025 Legislative Session, over 700 Maryland Catholics from 45 different Catholic parishes and religious communities across the State joined together through MCCH to support several key environmental bills under consideration by the General Assembly. MCCH is independent, though, and should be distinguished as an organization from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy positions of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

Because we are attuned both to the cry of a distressed Earth and the cry of the poor who suffer first and foremost from the environmental damage caused by human activities, **MCCH would like to express its strong support for the passage of Senate Bill 719, Sewage Sludge – Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances – Regulation.**

As Catholics, we are guided by the teachings of Pope Leo XIV, Pope Francis, and their predecessors, which have given priority to (1) care for Earth’s environment and (2) concern for the way in which pollution and climate change especially affect those who are poor. Pope Leo XIV, in an address last year, stated that “Everyone in society, through non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups, must put pressure on governments to develop and implement more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls” in order “to mitigate the damage done to the environment.”¹

In his 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*,² Pope Francis outlined the Catholic Church’s concerns regarding “pollution that affects everyone, caused by transport, industrial fumes, substances which contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and agrotoxins in general.” (no. 20) He highlighted threats to drinking water, because “access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.” (no. 30)

In recent years, public health professionals have become more acutely aware of the threats to human health from groundwater supplies and drinking water contaminated by PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances).

¹ “Address of The Holy Father Leo XIV to the Participants in the ‘Raising Hope’ Conference on the Tenth Anniversary of the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*,” 1 October 2025, available at <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/october/documents/20251001-conferenza-mariapoli.html>.

² The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Commonly known as “forever chemicals”—because PFAS do not break down in nature—these chemicals migrate throughout the natural systems around us, presenting dangers to humans from direct exposure through drinking water; through consumption of milk and certain fruits and vegetables containing PFAS; and through bioaccumulation in fish and wildlife.

One important source of PFAS contamination in the environment is from the application of sewage sludge containing PFAS to farmland. Rural residents and communities that rely on groundwater for their drinking water supplies can be particularly affected by this contamination.

Senate Bill 719 takes important first steps towards addressing the danger to public health and the environment from PFAS in sewage sludge (1) by clarifying and enhancing the authority of the Maryland Department of the Environment and local jurisdictions to set pretreatment standards for PFAS in wastewater treatment plants, (2) by permitting local jurisdictions to set rates and fees for industrial users discharging PFAS, (3) by requiring wastewater treatment plants conduct a study to identify the source of PFAS entering their plants, if their sewage sludge has over 25 parts per billion of PFAS contamination, and (4) by establishing a three-tier system of protection for Maryland farms from PFAS-contaminated sewage sludge, based on PFAS concentrations. The bill also offers some operational and transitional flexibility for wastewater treatment plants as the bill’s provisions take effect.

These steps are important and positive steps that will help Maryland safeguard its drinking water sources, environment, and the health of its farmers and communities.

For these reasons we strongly urge your support for this bill. Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 719.