



Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

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

Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland General Assembly
February 24, 2026

**Statement of Support (FAVORABLE)
of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on
HB 940, Large Load Customers – Electric System Interconnection and Demand Response Program**

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 a warming planet, **MCCH would like to express its strong support for the passage of House Bill 940, Large Load Customers – Electric System Interconnection and Demand Response Program.**

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, (2) concern for the economic burdens experienced by the poor, and (3) protection for the workers whose labor is essential to building our energy future.

In his 2015 encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*,¹ Pope Francis called for a comprehensive response to the threats from climate change, including especially “an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced (by) substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy.” (*Laudato Si’*, no. 26) He also identified “promoting ways of conserving energy” as an important line of action, including “encouraging the construction and repair of buildings aimed at reducing their energy consumption and levels of pollution.” (*Laudato Si’*, no. 180)

¹ 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.

Both of these aspects of Pope Francis' teaching are relevant to the situation posed by the proliferation of data centers and other facilities with large demands for electricity. Data centers and other large-load customers across the country are creating an unprecedented increase in actual and projected electricity load. This increase has outpaced the development of new electricity supply, leading to (1) increased costs for all consumers of electricity, (2) the postponement of retirement of older, more highly polluting generation facilities, (3) proposals to build fossil-fueled generation that will lock in higher greenhouse gas emissions for the next few decades, and (4) concerns about the reliability of the grid. These four undesirable trends will affect all Marylanders negatively, but especially low- and moderate-income Marylanders, who already cope with high energy bills, and in whose communities many of the most-polluting electric generation facilities are located. A concern for both environmental protection and environmental justice, in line with the social teaching of the Catholic Church,² should impel us to find a better path forward than the one on which we are headed.

House Bill 940 provides the elements of this better path. It requires all large-load customers seeking to interconnect in Maryland to provide capacity for 25 percent of load from clean energy sources (i.e., behind-the-meter storage, capacity purchase of new grid connection battery storage or new carbon-free generation in the Load Zone/Locational Delivery Area, or demand response). It provides them with a regulatory incentive to do much more, with expedited regulatory treatment for those large-load customers that provide capacity for 100 percent of their load from these clean energy sources, and also pay prevailing wages. It establishes a voluntary demand response program for large-load customers to support peak energy use reductions, which will relieve upward pressures on prices in the short term, and reduce the need to build new generation for which all electricity customers will have to pay in the long term. It tasks the Maryland Energy Administration with gathering information from all Maryland generators, to determine which generators have surplus interconnection potential that could be used to deploy new battery storage or other zero-emission resources quickly. Finally, it establishes a community benefit fee to ensure that all load studied is credible and likely to come online. This is important because if speculative interconnection requests, based on double- or triple-counting prospective load, lead to an overbuilding of capacity, then Maryland ratepayers will be ones to absorb the excessive costs. Funds in the community benefit account will be directed to energy assistance and energy efficiency upgrades for low- and moderate-income Marylanders through the EMPOWER program.

All of these elements ameliorate the negative impacts of the sudden growth in electricity demand from data centers and other large-load customers. And the provisions that workers in Maryland who labor on projects to build and maintain our energy infrastructure deserve fair wages and benefits is in keeping with Catholic social teaching that:

All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as to organize and join unions or other associations.³

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 House Bill 940.

² As recently as February 17, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published "An Invitation to Ecological Conversion for U.S. Catholics," stating that "Even where the challenges loom large, we must continue to advocate for changes to care for the earth and the poor, and to ensure opportunities for workers while we transition to more sustainable approaches." United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "An Invitation to Ecological Conversion for U.S. Catholics" (2026), available at <https://www.usccb.org/resources/invitation-ecological-conversion-us-catholics>.

³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "A Catholic Framework for Economic Life" (2015), no. 5, available at <https://www.usccb.org/resources/catholic-framework-economic-life-0>.