



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 17, 2026

House Bill 885

**Criminal Law - Causing Ingestion of an Abortion-Inducing Drug - Prohibition
(Women's Freedom From Coercion Act)
House Health and Judiciary Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) 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.

House Bill 885 prohibits a person from knowingly and willfully causing another to ingest an abortion-inducing drug when the person knows or believes that the other person is pregnant and without consent, through fraud or coercion, or by force or threat of force.

Life begins at conception, and every unique and irreplaceable human life deserves protection. Many women struggle with fertility, and for those who conceive, pregnancy is often accompanied by profound gratitude and recognition of life's inherent value. Any form of coercion or force that compels a woman to ingest abortion-inducing medication is immoral. With the availability of abortion pills, such as mifepristone and misoprostol, through online orders, the risks outlined in this legislation become even more pressing. This ease of access makes it alarmingly possible for women, particularly victims of domestic violence, to be coerced into unwanted abortions. If a woman ingests these medications against her will, she has only 72 hours to receive a prescribed abortion pill reversal treatment using progesterone, which could potentially save her pregnancy.¹

The dignity of every human person extends to both victims and offenders. The sentencing framework proposed in this legislation—authorizing penalties of up to 25 years—reflects the seriousness of the offense and aligns with penalties for second-degree murder. While no sentence can undo the profound harm caused or restore a lost life, justice requires that the legal system fully acknowledge the gravity of the crime.

¹ <https://abortionpillreversal.com/abortion-pill-reversal/faq>

Sentencing should serve the purposes of justice and reparation by recognizing both the harm inflicted on the mother and the unjust loss of her unborn child. Civil authorities have a fundamental duty to defend all human life, particularly when it is deliberately or unjustly endangered. When an unborn life is forcibly ended through coercion or violence, society must respond by affirming the value of that life and acknowledging the lasting trauma suffered by the mother and her family.

At the same time, the bill sponsor has amended the sentencing provisions to incorporate a prior amendment establishing a 10-year sentencing, reflecting an appropriate balance between accountability and the possibility of rehabilitation.

The Catholic Church seeks to contribute to a society that upholds human dignity while balancing justice with mercy. Punishment should serve not only as retribution but also as a means of rehabilitation. Our faith calls us to seek justice while offering offenders an opportunity to reform. True justice should: hold offenders accountable while encouraging transformation, support victims without resorting to vengeance, restore a sense of community while resisting a culture of violence, and address the root causes of crime, such as family breakdown, poverty, addiction, and systemic violence.² We oppose policies that merely increase prison sentences without addressing underlying issues. Instead, we advocate for restorative justice programs that emphasize community healing and personal accountability.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **HB 885**.

Thank you for your consideration.

² <https://www.usccb.org/resources/responsibility-rehabilitation-and-restoration-catholic-perspective-crime-and-criminal#intro>