

THE CATHOLIC VOICE

speaking for the vulnerable in Maryland's public square

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Annapolis, MD

Maryland Bishops Issue Human Trafficking Statement

The Catholic bishops in Maryland issued a joint statement on human trafficking Monday, and announced that the Catholic Church in Maryland will be sponsoring a series of information sessions throughout the state to address the issue. Human trafficking is often referred to as modern day slavery. Every year, thousands of men, women, and children fall into the hands of traffickers.

The statement from the Most. Rev. William E. Lori, Archbishop of Baltimore, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, and the Most. Rev. W. Francis Malooly, Bishop of Wilmington can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2oBLaRL> and details on the information sessions may be found here: <http://www.mdatholic.org/humantrafficking/infosessions>.



General Assembly Roundup

There are four days remaining in the 2017 legislative session of the Maryland General Assembly. The Maryland Catholic Conference advocates the Church's public policy positions in Annapolis for the more than one million Catholics living in the state.

Paid Sick Leave Bill Passes

This week, the Maryland General Assembly passed the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act (HB 1). On Monday night, the Senate voted 29-18 for the measure. Two days later the House of Delegates approved the Senate version of the bill 87-53, both of which are veto proof margins. The amended bill requires businesses with 15 or more employees to let their workers earn up to five days of sick time per year.

Currently more than 750,000 Marylanders do not have a single paid sick day, including many who live in fear they could lose their job if they get sick. Earned sick and safe leave improves public health, saves businesses as much as \$132 million each year - largely from reduced turnover - helps provide financial security for families to meet basic needs, and allows victims of domestic violence, stalking, or sexual assault better access the services they need without the threat of losing their jobs.

The Catholic Conference has worked closely with the 160 organizations in the Working Matters coalition lobbying for Paid Sick Leave: <https://www.facebook.com/WorkingMatters/photos/a.411473138938529.97543.383325011753342/1313690132050154/?type=3&theater>.

Legislation Extending the Civil Statute of Limitations on Child Abuse Cases Signed by Governor Hogan

On April 4, Gov. Larry Hogan signed House Bill 462, a bill that will allow survivors of childhood sexual abuse until age 38 to file a civil suit against an accused perpetrator or public or private employer of the perpetrator. The last time the state extended the statute of limitations on civil child abuse cases was in 2003, when the age of plaintiffs allowed to file suit was extended from age 21 to age 25. While the Church over the past few years has opposed similar legislation, the Maryland Catholic Conference worked this year with the bill's sponsor, Delegate C.T. Wilson (Charles County) and others, to craft a fair compromise that the Church could support.

"There were three key aspects of the bill that enabled us to support this year's version," said Mary Ellen Russell, the Conference's executive director. "First, it applied fairly to both public and private institutions. Past bills only applied to private institutions, which meant survivors of abuse in public institutions would not benefit from the bills. Secondly, it is prospective only, and will not open decades-old cases that leave institutions unable to defend themselves due to stale or missing evidence and a lack of witnesses. And finally, the sponsor and legislative leadership publicly agreed this issue will now be put to rest, and not revisited again every year. We have great sympathy and admiration for Delegate Wilson and other survivors who have worked on this issue over the years, and recognize the courage Delegate Wilson had to summon every year to testify for the bill. We are grateful that he will not have to endure that in the future, and that he was able to achieve an important victory for the survivors on whose behalf he was advocating."

The timing of the bill signing appropriately occurs at the beginning of Child Abuse Prevention Month (see more below). For more information about the Church's child protection measures, see www.mdatholic.org/childprotection.

Child Abuse Prevention Month

During the month of April, in honor of National Child Abuse Prevention Month, people across the country come together to raise awareness about child abuse and learn about the signs of child abuse and how to prevent it. Communities offer support to families and children by reinforcing strategies that are working and by providing resources and activities to help end child abuse and neglect.

The Catholic bishops of the United States are committed to their Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal. Learn about the efforts: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/child-abuse-prevention-month.cfm>.

Because We Are Catholic

During the General Assembly's legislative session, the Conference produces a short feature on the good things happening in the Church in the state of Maryland. The final story of 2017 takes us to Seton Keough High School in Baltimore where students are raising money and awareness for cancer: <http://bit.ly/2nNN6Ga>.



Students at Seton Keough walk last year in honor of a classmate's mother who was battling cancer