



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE + ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON + DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 15, 2010

Dear Maryland Lawmaker,

We are Catholic constituents in your district. Though Catholic Lobby Night has been canceled and we are unable to speak with you in person, we still wanted to share our views on building up the common good.

Below is a short review of issues of concern to Catholics this legislative session, to which we hope you will give your careful consideration. The list below does not reflect all the issues on which the Maryland Catholic Conference will take a position. If you would like additional information on these or other issues, please contact the Conference.

**Poverty and Social Service Programs – State Budget Items**

**Position: Oppose cuts to programs that serve those most in need**

The budget deficit which the state faces in the 2011 fiscal year necessitates a difficult evaluation of funding levels across the board, and we recognize that almost every option for balancing the budget will be difficult or unpopular. However, we also recognize that the budget – even in the toughest fiscal times – reflects the state’s priorities. We ask you to give highest priority to preserving programs that help vulnerable Marylanders meet their basic needs, especially as the economy has left some in our state newly in need of help and many social service programs were already underfunded or understaffed.

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**BOAST Maryland Tax Credit – SB 385/HB 946**

**Position: Support**

Maryland’s Catholic and other nonpublic schools educate 127,000 students at a savings to taxpayers of more than \$1.5 billion annually in per-pupil costs. In this difficult budget year, the state cannot afford to lose those savings through declines in nonpublic school enrollment or nonpublic school closures. We therefore urge your enthusiastic support of the BOAST (Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers) Tax Credit. **BOAST has been introduced this year without funding and with a focus on administrative authorization.** It would offer businesses a state income tax credit in exchange for their donations to scholarship programs for nonpublic school students or enrichment programs for public school students.

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**Stem Cell Research Fund – Sickle Cell Disease – Funding – HB 371**

**Position: Support**

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a debilitating illness that primarily targets African Americans, has few treatment options available for adult patients, and has traditionally been underfunded. Two years in a row, applications for grants to the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund to study treatment of SCD using adult stem cells were rejected. A recent study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* showed that 9 out of 10 adult patients of SCD were considered cured of the illness using therapies developed through adult stem cell research. HB 371 would build on this success by devoting 5% of the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund to fund adult stem cell research for SCD, ensuring that some of the Fund will be used for its stated purpose: applied research to rapidly save lives.

*MCC contact: Nancy Paltell, Ph. D., [nancy@mdcathcon.org](mailto:nancy@mdcathcon.org), 410-269-1155.*

**Criminal Law – Death Penalty – Evidence – SB 404**

**Position: Oppose**

The Catholic Church has steadfastly supported an end to capital punishment in Maryland, and recognizes that the available punishment of life without the possibility of parole is a just and sufficient means of protecting Maryland's citizens while also upholding human dignity. SB 404 would diminish the gains made last year when the General Assembly approved strict evidence requirements for death penalty cases. Expansion of cases eligible for the death penalty contradicts the recommendation of the Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment to repeal executions in our state. Allowing evidence as unreliable as fingerprints or photographs is a step backwards, and would increase the possibility of convicting an innocent person.

*MCC contact: Mary Ellen Russell, [mrussell@mdcathcon.org](mailto:mrussell@mdcathcon.org), 410-269-1155.*

**Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act – SB 582/HB 808 (OPPOSE)**

**Foreign Same-Sex Marriage – Invalidity – SB 852 (SUPPORT)**

The public overwhelmingly supports maintaining marriage as the union of one man and one woman, as evidenced by public votes in Maine, California and 29 other states, as well as recent legislative votes in New York and New Jersey. We agree that civil marriage must continue to be upheld as the union of one man and one woman because of that relationship's unique ability to produce children, society's next generation. We also believe that debate over the definition of marriage belongs to us, Maryland's voters, and the lawmakers we have elected to represent us, and should not be determined based on decisions by out-of-state courts and legislatures. Finally, we are concerned that redefining marriage would violate the religious freedoms of institutions and individuals.

*MCC contact: Mary Ellen Russell, [mrussell@mdcathcon.org](mailto:mrussell@mdcathcon.org), 410-269-1155.*

We appreciate your consideration of our petitions in these matters, and wish you success in what remains of your 2010 legislative work.

Sincerely,

Your Catholic Neighbors and Constituents

