



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE + ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON + DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**Statement before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
RE: Senate Bill 373
The BOAST Maryland Tax Credit
Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers in Maryland**

SUPPORT

**Submitted February 13, 2008
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee: The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the public-policy interests of the bishops serving Maryland from the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

We offer this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 373, which would create the BOAST Maryland Tax Credit (Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers in Maryland.) The potential benefits of this proposal are manifold: not only would the BOAST Maryland tax credit leverage significantly increased business support for Maryland's students and teachers, it would also help to increase public awareness of the many successful educational options available to students and families in our local neighborhoods.

For Catholic and many other nonpublic schools, the BOAST Maryland tax credit holds great promise for our efforts to continue a service we have provided for generations to lower- and middle-income families. The loss of that service, already a reality for several communities in Baltimore City and other areas, will cost more than the dollars needed to absorb the likely increase in per-pupil expenditures for public schools. The loss of institutions that have historically provided a stabilizing presence in many local neighborhoods would undoubtedly also have a negative economic impact in areas where there is a critical need to attract residents and businesses alike.

The support provided through this program is urgently needed by the Catholic school community in Maryland. As tuitions continue to rise to meet the increasing costs of teacher salaries, our school enrollments show that more and more families are unable to afford these increases, especially at the elementary level. As the attached figures indicate, Catholic school elementary enrollment has decreased by more than 5,000 students in the past five years, and 16 Catholic schools have closed or merged in the state. The increased tuition assistance that the BOAST Maryland tax credit would generate would greatly alleviate the challenges our schools are facing.

The benefit the BOAST Maryland tax credit offers to the public school community provides an important complement to the support that the state already provides our public schools. Every student, and each local community, has unique needs and gifts. Through the increased support for school enrichment programs that would be generated by the BOAST Maryland tax credit, local public schools and local businesses can build important partnerships in targeting the specific needs of their student populations, so that all students have access to opportunities that will truly enable them to reach their full potential in the classroom and beyond.

It is also especially important to keep in mind the need to maintain affordable, educational options for all families in light of the anticipated strain that our public schools are likely to face in accommodating new students due to the upcoming military Base Realignment and Closure program. As the state addresses the challenges of public school overcrowding, it is important to recognize the role that nonpublic schools can play in helping to alleviate those challenges – as long as they remain affordable to as many families as possible.

Finally, the BOAST Maryland tax credit proposal recognizes the critical need of providing our teachers affordable access to the training necessary to become and remain highly qualified, and the vital role that our teachers play in the success of our students.

Our state offers tax credits to reward investment in many worthy enterprises. Surely there is no investment more worthy of our support than the investment in Maryland's students and teachers. We urge you to support Senate Bill 373 and the BOAST Maryland tax credit as an important vehicle for providing that support to all students and teachers in Maryland.