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**STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 111
HATE CRIMES – PROHIBITIONS AND PROTECTED CLASSES –
HOMELESS PERSONS AND GROUPS**

**Presented Wednesday, January 30, 2008 to the
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

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The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the public-policy interests of the Roman Catholic bishops serving Maryland's three (arch)dioceses. Today the Conference comes to you in support of Senate Bill 111, which would expand the definition of hate crimes to include hate-related attacks committed against homeless individuals.

Unfortunately, Maryland has reason to seek such legislation – at least three homeless Marylanders have been killed by attackers who targeted them because they had no home. In 1992, a 63-year-old homeless Korean War veteran was found dead in Anne Arundel County. He had been beaten, soaked with beer and urine, kicked down a ravine, covered with trash, and buried in a shallow grave. His attackers called him a “worthless bum” as they carried out these horrifying acts. In 2001, a group of young men decided to “clean up” their South Baltimore neighborhood by “bum stomping” – bludgeoning homeless men to force them out of the area. Two homeless men were killed and several others were seriously injured. When asked why they had done such a thing, one of the attackers answered, “I consider them trash.”

In the past two years, similar attacks in Florida, California, and Massachusetts have made national headlines. Video recordings caught teenagers using baseball bats to attack a homeless man in Fort Lauderdale. The teens were later charged with assaulting two homeless men and murdering another – all on the same night. In San Francisco, video surveillance captured three men beating an elderly homeless man outside a florist's shop. In Boston, two men kicked a sleeping homeless man, left, and then returned, pouring a flammable liquid over the man, and setting his legs on fire. And these are just the attacks that made the national news.

While the attackers of these homeless individuals may have called them “worthless bums” and considered them “trash”, the Conference believes otherwise. Ten years ago, in his

1997 Lenten message, Pope John Paul II said, "In the Old Testament, the Torah teaches that strangers and the homeless in general, inasmuch as they are exposed to all sorts of dangers, deserve special concern from the believer."

Homeless Marylanders also deserve special concern from the State. They deserve the protection that SB 111, and the attention accompanying it, will bring them. Maryland must not treat hate-related attacks on the homeless as unworthy of notice, but must rather raise their visibility by considering them, and prosecuting them, as hate crimes.

The Conference respectfully asks that you stand up for homeless Marylanders by voting in favor of SB 111. Thank you for your consideration.