

The 2020 Maryland Legislative Session wrapped at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 18, nearly 3 weeks ahead of schedule. The usual fanfare and celebration that accompanies Sine Die were absent this year, and the session closed on a somewhat somber note.

Legislators chose to shorten the 2020 session due to the growing coronavirus crisis in the state, saying they would likely be back for a special session at the end of May.

Due to the abbreviated session, many bills, including some supported and some opposed by the Maryland Catholic Conference, failed to advance. Others now sit on Gov. Larry Hogan's desk awaiting a signature. Technically, any bill that did not pass during the session is considered failed. However, any bill may be reintroduced in a future session, including in May if the legislature reconvenes.

"The conclusion of this session was unlike any in Maryland's recent past and while we understand why the legislature chose to take this unprecedented action, we realize that it means our work for this year may not yet be over," said Jenny Kraska, executive director of the Conference. "Many bills failed to reach the finish line because the session was cut short, but we could to see some of those bills introduced again if the legislature does reconvene in May."

Maryland Catholic Conference priorities: Education.

Maryland's constitution only requires the General Assembly to pass two bills during the annual legislative session: the operating budget and the capital budget, both of which were passed. Maryland's fiscal year begins July 1.

With the passage of the budget, the state continued its support of the **BOOST Scholarship Program** — which provides scholarships to low-income families to send their children to Catholic or other nonpublic school — as well as programs that provide financial support to nonpublic schools to fix aging infrastructure, enhance safety or provide textbooks and/or technology to students.

Legislators level-funded the **BOOST program at \$7.5 million** again for the 2021 school year. The state will also maintain funding at \$3.5 million each for the Nonpublic Aging Schools Program and the Nonpublic Safety Improvement program. The Textbook and Technology Programs will receive \$6 million for fiscal year 2021.

A top priority for legislators during the 2020 session was enacting the recommendations of the Kirwin Commission. Legislators introduced and ultimately passed the "**Blueprint for Maryland's Future**" (HB 1300) and among many changes, expanded the state's Pre-Kindergarten program. The legislation is headed to Gov. Hogan's desk and will be implemented with a significant portion of Pre-Kindergarten expansion seats going to nonpublic providers during the next 10 years, beginning in fiscal year 2022. To read more about the bill [CLICK HERE](#).

Maryland Catholic Conference priorities: Respect for Life

Failing to advance again this session was the fifth attempt to legalize **physician-assisted suicide** in Maryland. The bill (SB 701/HB 643) received a hearing in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, but was never brought up for a vote. The House version of the bill did not receive a hearing. Dozens of people attended the Feb. 28 hearing to speak against this dangerous legislation. To read more about that hearing [CLICK HERE](#). To learn more about the issue of physician-assisted suicide and the church's opposition to it, please [CLICK HERE](#).

Minutes before a hearing would have taken place on a bill (SB 664) to put a constitutional amendment for the right to privacy on the upcoming ballot, the bill was withdrawn by the sponsor, Senator Susan Lee (D-16). The Senator assured the Conference that her intent regarding this legislation was to protect people in Maryland from the unauthorized collection of personal data and not to enshrine a right to abortion in our constitution.

Maryland Catholic Conference priorities: Social and Economic Justice

After a decade of advocacy efforts and numerous local jurisdictions enacting similar protections, the **Housing Opportunities Made Equal Act**, or HOME Act, (HB 231/SB 530) finally passed at the state level, and now heads to Gov. Hogan's desk for a signature. Once enacted, Maryland law will prohibit landlords from discriminating against potential renters based on their source of income, such as pensions, alimony, gifts, or government assistance, including rental assistance programs or housing vouchers.

Also passing this session was legislation the Conference strongly supported in partnership with the **Maryland Human Trafficking** Task Force that will expand the list of crimes eligible to be vacated from the criminal record of a human trafficking victim to include misdemeanors common to victims if those crimes were committed while under the influence of their trafficker (HB 242/SB 206).

"Practically, this bill allows survivors of human trafficking to remove convictions for low-level crimes that their trafficker forced them to commit, therefore removing barriers to opportunities that help them move on from their horrific trafficking experiences, such as education, housing, and employment," said Anne Wallerstedt, associate director of Social and Economic Justice for the Conference. "The Conference was proud and humbled to lead the legislative efforts of the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force this session."

Unfortunately, many bills supported by the Conference failed to advance.

Ironically, while lawmakers understood the importance of providing paid time off for significant life occurrences — such as the current coronavirus crisis — the **Time to Care Act (HB 839/SB 539)** was unable to advance out of committee in light of the pressing concerns of COVID-19 and the significantly shortened

session. The bill would have provided up to 12 weeks of paid leave for the birth or adoption of a baby, personal illness or injury, or to care for aging family members, through the creation of a state-run insurance program funded by contributions from both employers and employees.

Many pieces of legislation aimed at **protecting undocumented individuals and immigrant communities** were unable to pass both chambers, again due to the shortened timing of session. These included bills designed to curtail immigration enforcement activities in sensitive locations such as schools, hospitals, places of worship, and courthouses (HB 403/SB 903); end contracts with the federal government related to immigration detention centers in the state (HB 677/SB 850); protect MVA records from unnecessary interference (HB 892/SB 649); and regulate interactions between local law enforcement officials and vulnerable immigrant communities (HB 1612/SB 901, HB 388). All of these bills either moved in committee or in one chamber, but none advanced to a final vote.

Recognizing the urgency of the State of Maryland to step up to protect the environment, numerous bills were introduced to tackle this issue, and the Conference was proud to support those efforts, especially in light of the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'* this May. However, legislation to expand the state's commitment to using renewable energy sources (HB 98/SB 168, HB 438/SB 560) and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (HB 1425/SB 926) ultimately were unable to make it out of committee.

In total, the Conference supported more than 100 pieces of legislation this session. Ensure our legislators know the Catholic position on these and many other life issues.

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