

# **BOAST bill makes progress**

While leaders of the Maryland Catholic Conference are optimistic that a proposed business tax credit benefitting public and nonpublic schools will have strong support in the Senate, the legislation must first clear a hurdle in the House of Delegates Ways and Means Committee.

BOAST (Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers in Maryland) would provide tax credits to businesses that donate to scholarship organizations benefitting students in nonpublic schools.

Businesses that contribute to enrichment programs for students in public schools would also receive tax credits, and the program would allow nonpublic school teachers to receive grants for professional development.

The legislation (Senate Bill 715/House Bill 1259) is modeled after a Pennsylvania law that raised more than \$360 million since 2001. The Maryland proposal would not provide funding, but would authorize the program so that it could receive money in the future.

“I really think we’ve made progress this year,” said Ellen Robertson, MCC associate director for education and family life.

Ms. Robertson said it will take “strong leadership from the leaders of the House” before some opponents on the committee will budge on the issue.

“We’re hopeful,” she said. “We’re working very hard.”

A similar BOAST measure failed to make it out of committee in the House last year, but was approved on a 30-17 vote in the Senate.

Ms. Robertson urged Catholics to contact their lawmakers and ask them to support the legislation. She pointed out that many lawmakers, including those who oppose BOAST, recognize that nonpublic schools are facing tremendous burdens in a difficult economy and that they provide savings to the state.

Catholic schools in Maryland save state taxpayers more than \$665 million annually, and nonpublic schools in general save taxpayers more than \$1.5 billion in annual per-pupil expenditures. Nonpublic schools educate students who would otherwise enroll in the public school system, according to BOAST advocates.

Ms. Robertson was pleased that the House of Delegates appropriations committee did not reduce Gov. Martin J. O'Malley's proposed \$2.4 million in state funding for nonreligious textbooks and technology in nonpublic schools. The governor had already reduced funding 33 percent from last year's allotment.

The Senate is not expected to strip or reduce the funding from the budget, Ms. Robertson said.

"We have indications that there's a commitment to this," she said. "We're still keeping a watchful eye on it."

As The Catholic Review went to press March 24, the House of Delegates was expected to vote on legislation concerning the death penalty.

*Call 410-841-3469 to contact the House Ways and Means Committee on the BOAST legislation.*