

Cardinal asks Gov-elect O'Malley for budget support

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Cardinal William H. Keeler is asking Gov.-elect Martin J. O'Malley to provide budgetary support for programs benefiting nonpublic schools and women in crisis pregnancies.

In a Dec. 12 letter, Cardinal Keeler urged the new governor to increase funding for a program providing nonreligious textbooks and technology for students in nonpublic schools.

The allocation for the textbook/technology program dipped to \$3 million two years ago, but was increased to \$4 million by Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. last year. Cardinal Keeler requested that Gov.-elect O'Malley restore funding to \$6 million, the amount approved for the program when it was launched by Gov. Parris N. Glendening.

While funding has declined, the cardinal said an additional 10,000 students have enrolled in the program in the last several years, significantly diminishing the savings the program provides to nonpublic-school families "from at least \$60 per student when the program began, to a current level of only about \$22 per student."

The cardinal also asked the new governor to include \$1 million for a new Women's Services Program, which would provide grants to nonprofit agencies that promote childbirth over abortion. The cardinal noted that during a meeting with leaders of the Maryland Catholic Conference before the election, Gov.-elect O'Malley had expressed openness to the funding proposal.

Cardinal Keeler wrote the letter on behalf of all the bishops of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, the three dioceses that serve the state of Maryland.