

Gov. Hogan throws support behind business tax credit, coalition forms

By George P. Matysek Jr.

gmatysek@CatholicReview.org

Twitter: @ReviewMatysek

As Gov. Lawrence Hogan Jr. threw his strong support behind a proposed business tax credit benefitting public and nonpublic schools, a coalition of business and community leaders has formed to push passage of the bill.

The legislation would provide a 60 percent tax credit of up to \$200,000 to businesses that donate to nonprofit student assistance organizations that provide financial support for tuition, transportation, special education and other services.

Credits would be capped at no more than \$15 million, with 60 percent of the credits directed to support nonpublic students and 40 percent to public school students.

“What I think is happening right now is more and more people are starting to say, ‘If we have funding sources and opportunities to improve education, why wouldn’t we take advantage of that?’ ” said J. Scott Wilfong, president and CEO of SunTrust Bank, Greater Washington/Maryland and one of the business leaders in the 22-member coalition.

“The 300-pound gorilla in the room is how to get the teachers unions to agree that this is additive, not diminutive,” Wilfong said. “We have to work to get the unions to understand this isn’t threatening their viability or their position as it relates to education.”

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The Maryland Catholic Conference, legislative lobbying arm of the state’s Catholic bishops, noted that Maryland already has 25 business tax credits, but none for investment in K-12 education. The tax credit is modeled on similar programs in 14 other states.

In previous legislative sessions, the proposed tax credit passed the Senate, but stalled in the House of Delegates.

“We need to urge the House and Speaker (Michael) Busch to pass this bill because it’s the right thing to do to help our kids,” said Garrett O’Day, MCC associate director for education and family life.

O’Day praised the “unparalleled support” of the governor, who held a Feb. 26 news conference in Annapolis supporting both the tax credit and a proposal to expand

charter schools in Maryland.

The governor is expected to join Archbishop William E. Lori at a March 4 Nonpublic School Advocacy Day in support of the tax credit. More than 700 students from 30 nonpublic schools across the state are scheduled to attend the Annapolis rally and meet with their lawmakers. Senate President Thomas V. “Mike” Miller Jr. of Prince George’s County is among those expected to attend.

The Senate version of the bill was filed by Sen. Edward DeGrange of Anne Arundel County. The House bill was part of Hogan’s legislative package.

Other members of the coalition include Bonnie L. Phipps, president and chief executive officer of St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore; William J. McCarthy Jr., executive director of Catholic Charities; Martin V. Proctor Jr., a senior vice president of Exelon Corporation; and Brian C. Rogers, chairman of the T. Rowe Price Group.

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