

Governor maintains textbook funding level

Gov. Martin J. O'Malley's proposed 2011 state budget includes \$4.4 million for textbooks for Maryland's non-public schools, the same amount as last year.

The Democratic governor's proposed funding is for non-sectarian books and computer software in non-public schools that charge tuition at or below the per pupil cost, which is \$13,495.44. The funding still faces hurdles in the Maryland General Assembly, which started its session Jan. 12 and will end April 11.

"We're very appreciative of the governor's budget and the fact that he did level fund the textbook program this year," said Ellen Robertson, the Maryland Catholic Conference's Associate Director for Education and Family Life. "We're appreciative, but we know we still have plenty of work to do in the budget committees because it's not a done deal at this point in time."

The MCC is the lobbying arm of the state's Catholic Bishops from the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Delaware.

Robertson said the MCC will work to protect the funding as it is reviewed by each of the budget committees, which includes Appropriations in the House of Delegates and Budget and Taxation in the Senate. She anticipates a mid-February review of the budget items. Both could decrease the funding during budget negotiations. Toward the end of the session, Robertson said, conference committee will come into play.

"Hopefully everything is restored to where the governor funded it in his initial budget," Robertson said.

Robertson said the textbook funding number reached \$6 million in 2001 and a low of \$3 million between 2004 and 2006. The funding rose to \$4 million in 2007 and 2008, before dipping to \$3.6 million in 2009.

She hopes for greater funding in the future.

“There’s always a hope it will increase,” Robertson said, “but, realistically speaking, this year will probably not be the year it will increase given the state of the economy and the challenges the general assembly does have this year.”