

Governor signs legislation regarding abuse reporting, death penalty commission

Gov. Martin J. O'Malley signed a number of bills into law May 13, including House Bill 1111/ Senate Bill 614 establishing a Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment and Senate Bill 238/ House Bill 75 requiring nonpublic schools to receive a report when one of their students is arrested for a serious offense. Both measures were supported by Maryland's Catholic bishops.

"We're gratified not only that the governor has signed this important legislation into law, but by his commitment to repeal the state's death penalty statute," said Richard J. Dowling, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, regarding HB111/SB 614.

While the MCC had hoped the death penalty could have been repealed this year, Mr. Dowling said the death penalty commission will provide recommendations regarding racial, jurisdictional and socioeconomic disparities in death penalty sentencing as well as the risk of executing innocent people.

The commission, which is authorized to hold public hearings, is required to issue a report by Dec. 15.

"The commission is expected to begin its proceedings, which should involve some public hearings, late this summer," Mr. Dowling said. "While the members of the commission haven't yet been named, I expect that they will reflect a variety of views in the matter of how we treat people who commit grievous crimes. I think we'll learn a lot from the public hearings, and I'm sure the commission will reflect the views of those who testify in its final report."

The notification law for nonpublic school superintendents and principals will help promote the safety and well-being of children said Alison D'Alessandro, director of the archdiocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection. Under the new law, nonpublic

school officials will be notified of the arrest of a nonpublic school student for a reportable offense. It provides for the confidentiality of information obtained by the nonpublic school official.

“It’s a very important child protection measure, and we’re very happy to see the bill was passed unanimously in both the House and the Senate,” said Mary Ellen Russell, MCC deputy director for education and family life.

“It’s as important for students who may be involved in a situation as it is for the entire school community,” said Ms. Russell, noting that the bill provides parity between public and private schools in providing access to information.

The legislation will help ensure nonpublic schools are able to provide “appropriate supervision over students who may pose a potential danger to others,” Ms. D’Alessandro told The Catholic Review.

George P. Matysek Jr. contributed to this story.