

# MCC urges lawmakers to address immigration legislation

Urging state lawmakers to show sensitivity and compassion toward immigrants, the Maryland Catholic Conference is raising concerns about several immigration-related bills it believes may unfairly target undocumented workers.

The bills include a measure to deny bail to those unable to prove they are in the United States legally and a proposal to prevent Maryland colleges from charging U.S. citizens higher tuition than citizens of other nations, regardless of their legal status.

While the bail bill is intended to prevent “catch-and-release” policies, MCC leaders are concerned such legislation would overtax the court system and unnecessarily detain U.S. citizens and legal immigrants alike.

“It’s impractical to expect our local court systems to ensure that every single person facing bail is here lawfully,” said Julie M. Varner, MCC associate director for social concerns. “It would create a situation where citizens are unable to get bail because they can’t produce the documents to prove their citizenship, and could lead to discriminatory situations for anyone who fits a certain description.”

Ms. Varner is concerned about the tuition bill because it would deny in-state tuition to all noncitizens – including documented immigrants who are here legally. The legislation would forbid the Board of Regents from classifying undocumented immigrants as in-state residents to qualify for less-expensive tuition. Ms. Varner believes such legislation is unnecessary.

“The State of Maryland currently does not allow undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition rates,” said Ms. Varner. “This bill would not change that.”

The MCC has not taken a position on a third piece of immigration legislation that would put Maryland in compliance with the federal Real ID security mandate, aimed at identifying potential terrorists and illegal immigrants.

Maryland is one of eight states that doesn't require driver's license applicants to provide documentation proving they are citizens or legal residents.

"Real ID is much more than an immigration issue," Ms. Varner said. "We believe it's an important issue that should be carefully considered because of its dramatic cost, privacy, and service implications."

Though the MCC hasn't taken a position on Real ID, it encourages a system that would license all Maryland drivers - regardless of their immigration status.

"It's important that drivers on Maryland's roads be licensed," Ms. Varner said, "because it benefits all Marylanders to have their drivers insured."