WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Jesse James, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

FROM: Barbara Sella, Executive Director

DATE: December 16, 2025

RE: SB 404, Task Force on Missing and Murdered African American Women and Girls

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, urges you to support Senate Bill 404, which creates a state task force on missing and murdered African American women and girls.

Others today will provide statistics on the rising number of missing and murdered African American women and girls in Wisconsin. What the WCC would like to stress is that such a task force is needed not just to shed light on the causes of and solutions to this violence, but also to raise public awareness of a situation that is often ignored.

For too long, African American victims of violence have not attracted the attention or sympathy of the larger community. This has included the Catholic Church. As the U.S. bishops note in their 2018 document, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, "All too often, leaders of the Church have remained silent about the horrific violence and other racial injustices perpetuated against African Americans and others."

We support this legislation, not just because of our belief in the equal dignity of every human life, but also for the sake of the common good. Each human being is made in the image and likeness of God and violence against one member affects us all because we are one human family. When any resident of our state goes missing or is murdered, it is not just a loss for that person, but for the community. When these tragedies happen, we must not look away. Instead, we must confront the situation and help our community.

We must all strive to do better. We must all search for ways to eliminate violence, no matter where it occurs, and to help victims, families, and communities heal. We must be in solidarity with each other across racial, political, social, economic, and religious divides.

This task force is a first step, but it will take everyone working together to uphold the life and dignity of every human person in Wisconsin.

We thank the authors of this bill for having the foresight and courage to bring this bipartisan legislation forward and we strongly urge you to support it. Thank you.

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