

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Testimony in Support of HB 160 **Replacing the death penalty with life without parole** **December 14, 2011**

Thank you, Chairman Slaby, ranking Minority Member, Winburn, and members of the Criminal Justice Committee. My name is Jim Tobin. I am an Associate Director with the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Catholic Conference of Ohio supports passage of HB 160. We believe fair and effective punishment is possible without using the death penalty.

I would like to share a brief outline of the Catholic perspective on this issue. We are not total abolitionists; rather we are practical abolitionists. Catholic teaching acknowledges the right of the state to impose the death penalty when it is absolutely necessary as the only possible means to defend and protect people's safety from an unjust aggressor. However, we believe, that today, such cases are practically non-existent.

Within Catholic teaching we strive for consistency in defending the value and dignity - the sacredness - of each human life from conception through natural death. We teach the legitimacy of self- defense and the safeguarding of the common good. We believe that legitimate public authority has the right and duty to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense.

As summarized before, the teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor, and assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined.

However, our teaching strongly emphasizes (as stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* # 2267): " If non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the

concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person.”

This teaching concludes: " Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm—without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself—the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity "are very rare, if not practically non-existent."

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio consistently have advocated for an end to the death penalty. We join with many other faith communities in urging passage of HB 160. We believe that establishing the ultimate punishment as true life without parole is a fair alternative to the death penalty. In other states and countries, life imprisonment has shown itself to be an effective alternative. Life imprisonment is not a sentence worse than death. Life imprisonment respects the moral view that all life, even that of the worst offender, has value and dignity. God should determine when such a person is ready to die, and not the state. Unlike the death penalty, life imprisonment better responds to the imperfections in human justice and allows time for mistakes to be corrected.

We look forward to the day when the death penalty is only remembered as part of Ohio’s history. Thank you for this opportunity.



STATEMENT ON THE DEATH PENALTY IN OHIO CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF OHIO

February 7, 2011

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio agree with recent comments made by both Ohio Supreme Court Justice Paul Pfeifer and former Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections Director Terry Collins that Ohio's elected legislative leaders ought to debate and ultimately abolish the death penalty.

Murder rightly evokes moral outrage and a call for justice. It also calls for spiritual healing and caring support for all those impacted by such a tragedy. Just punishment--punishment that reflects the seriousness of the offense, seeks restoration for the offense, and protects society - is a foundational moral principle within our justice system.

Just punishment can occur without resorting to the death penalty. Our Church teachings consider the death penalty to be wrong in almost all cases. Every human being is a child of God, no matter what sins the person commits. Every human life has infinite dignity because it is designed by God to be immortal.

Today, given the means available to the State for dealing with crime, cases where it is absolutely necessary to use the death penalty are practically nonexistent. In other states and countries, life imprisonment has shown itself to be an effective alternative. Life imprisonment respects the moral view that all life, even that of the worst offender, has value and dignity.

We concur with Judge Pfeifer that today is an "opportune time in Ohio to seriously debate and discuss whether or not we have the death penalty". We urge Governor Kasich, Attorney General DeWine, and our elected legislative leaders to pursue such debate. Fair and effective punishment is possible without the death penalty.

Most Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr
Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Most Rev. Richard G. Lennon
Bishop of Cleveland

Most Rev. Roger W. Gries
Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland

Most Rev. Frederick F. Campbell
Bishop of Columbus

Most Rev. John Kudrick
Bishop of Byzantine Eparchy of Parma

Most Rev. R. Daniel Conlon
Bishop of Steubenville

Most Rev. Leonard P. Blair
Bishop of Toledo

Most Rev. George V. Murry S.J.
Bishop of Youngstown

Most Rev. J. Michael Botean
Bishop of Romanian Eparchy of Canton

Most Rev. John Bura
Apostolic Administrator St. Josaphat
Ukrainian Eparchy

**The Catholic Conference of Ohio
supports legislation to replace Ohio's
death penalty with life-without-parole.**

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

9 E. Long St., Columbus, Ohio 43215
614-224-7147, www.ohiocathconf.org