

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Statement in Support of Ohio Legislation Ending the Death Penalty

March 14, 2011

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Ohio, I am pleased to offer our Conference's wholehearted support for legislative efforts to end the death penalty in Ohio. We thank Representative Celeste and the other cosponsors of this legislation for having the political courage to pursue such an important, yet difficult, life issue. Murder rightly evokes moral outrage and a call for justice. Justice should reflect the seriousness of the offense, seek restoration for the offense, and protect society. The Catholic faith community, like so many other faith communities, believes that justice can occur without resorting to the death penalty.

This February, the Ohio Catholic bishops issued a public statement reaffirming our church's teaching that the death penalty should no longer be used. It stressed our deep conviction that all human life has value and dignity, even the life of the worst offender. This statement also affirmed the challenge given by Justice Pfeifer and former Correction's director, Terry Collins. This challenge called upon our legislative leaders to seriously debate whether or not Ohio should have the death penalty. There are better ways to protect society. We hope and pray that this legislation, as well as the recent ending of the death penalty in Illinois, will be the catalyst for such a debate.

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 a fair, safe, and effective alternative. Unlike the death penalty, life imprisonment better responds to the imperfections in human justice and allows time for mistakes to be corrected.

We encourage legislative leaders to pursue extensive hearings on this bill. We look forward to the day when the death penalty is only remembered as part of Ohio's history.