

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

October 14, 2015

Testimony in support of SB 162: Prohibiting the use of the death penalty for persons with serious mental illness

Chairman Eklund, vice chairman Obhof, ranking member Thomas and members of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Jim Tobin. I am an Associate Director with the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Conference urges your strong support of SB 162.

The Catholic Church has a long-standing history of opposition to the use of the death penalty. We would prefer not having this debate on who should be exempted from the death penalty. All persons should be exempt. Abolishing the death penalty, while maintaining life imprisonment, would be a just and effective alternative. Pope Francis, during his recent visit to the United States, encouraged the abolition of the death penalty. He stated in his address to the U.S. Congress:

“I am convinced that this way [global abolition of the death penalty] is the best, since every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, and society can only benefit from the rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes. Recently my brother bishops here in the United States renewed their call for the abolition of the death penalty. Not only do I support them, but I also offer encouragement to all those who are convinced that a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation...”

With that being said, SB 162 is an important and achievable reform of Ohio's death penalty system. Regardless of your position on the death penalty, we hope each of you will agree that our State ought not be executing persons with clearly defined mental illness.

We thank the sponsors of this legislation, Senators Seitz, Williams, Eklund, Lehner, Thomas, Balderson, Sawyer, Brown, Hite, Yuko, Schiavoni, Beagle, and Tavares. We are pleased to join with the many mental health groups that support this legislation.

Thank you for this opportunity.