



**Proponent Testimony HB 50
Senate Community Revitalization Committee
Catholic Conference of Ohio
December 6th, 2023**

Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Community Revitalization Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Will Kuehnle, and I am an Associate Director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Catholic Conference of Ohio is the official voice of the Catholic Church in Ohio on public policy, and we urge your support for HB 50 to create a certificate of qualification for housing (CQH).

The Catholic Conference of Ohio advocates for public policies that ensure that our criminal justice system fulfills its restorative purpose. Restoration demands that we respond to the victims of crime with care and compassion, but the full administration of justice is impossible unless we also attend to the dignity of those returning from prison. However, formerly incarcerated men and women face tremendous barriers to reintegration. Obstacles such as unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, and emotional and psychological distress are amplified by the challenge of finding housing. Sustained rehabilitation, a principal goal of a moral criminal justice system, becomes nearly impossible in the absence of the safety and stability of a home.

Therefore, becoming a tenant is one of the most important steps a formerly incarcerated person takes in their reintegration, and failure to do so dramatically increases the likelihood of recidivism. The certificate of qualification for housing created by HB 50 is one mechanism to stop the cycle of recidivism. Escaping this cycle benefits the individual, their family, and their communities. The CQH, which would follow a rigorous review process, would provide Ohioans leaving incarceration the ability to strengthen their housing application and put a potential landlord's mind at ease.

Proportionality is an essential feature of justice. In the absence of public acts of confidence in a person's future, like a CQH, the first time a person receives a criminal sentence can easily become a lifetime of sorrow and agony in the form of homelessness and despair, which themselves become the basis of recurring criminal behavior. This is far beyond the intended proportionality of Ohio's criminal justice system. For these reasons, the Catholic Bishops of Ohio encourage you to counter the causes of recidivism by supporting HB 50.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer your questions.