

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

September 23, 2021

Testimony in Support of HB 183 Abolish the death penalty; revise juror challenge numbers

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Jerry Freewalt. I am the Executive Director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Conference urges your support of HB 183.

It is time for the State of Ohio to abolish the death penalty. The Catholic Church has a long-standing history of opposition to the use of the death penalty. Abolishing the death penalty, while maintaining life imprisonment, would be a just and effective alternative.

The Catholic opposition to the death penalty is ultimately rooted in mercy and is eminently pro-life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reads:

“Today there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.

Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.” #2267.

Cincinnati Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr, board chair of the Conference, echoed this pro-life message in a recent letter to the Catholic faithful. He writes:

As Catholics, we believe that all life, given by God, has immutable dignity that can never be taken away. This belief is challenged in many ways – one of which – the State of Ohio’s continued use of the death penalty as a form of punishment in our criminal justice system.

More destruction of human life through capital punishment does not enhance people’s respect for the sacredness of life of every person. There is a better way for Ohio to carry out justice and mercy. We and a growing chorus of voices across Ohio urge you to end to this practice and support HB 183.

We thank the sponsors of this legislation, Representatives Schmidt and Miller.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.