



Proponent Testimony HB 460
House Criminal Justice Committee
Catholic Conference of Ohio
May 7th, 2024

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Criminal Justice 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 support HB 460, the Getting Rehabilitated Ohioans Working or GROW Act.

The Catholic Church calls for public policies that ensure justice while directing the criminal justice system to achieve its ends of rehabilitation and restoration. This bill does both without compromising the demands of reparation following a criminal conviction. HB 460 does not alter the qualification for the sealing of records nor call for modification of sentencing standards. This bill simply reforms the traditional sealing process so that concomitant costs, time, and accessibility do not prevent otherwise rehabilitated individuals from reentering the workforce and reintegrating into their community. This will enhance the fairness of Ohio's sealing process.

Successful reintegration, which the GROW Act encourages, is the prime determinant of recidivism. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the state to automatically seal eligible criminal records rather than require additional, arduous steps that do not themselves represent the sentence imposed by the court.

As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated, "Just as God never abandons us, so too we must be in covenant with one another. We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or reintegration of all into the community." This bill presents an opportunity to strengthen the commitment of our communities to healing and to demonstrate Ohio's moral commitment to redemption.

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