



**Proponent Testimony HB 259**  
**Catholic Conference of Ohio**  
**House Finance Committee**  
**October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Chair Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance 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 bishops of Ohio urge your support for House Bill 259 to aid victims of crime and abolish the death penalty in favor of life without parole.

The Catholic Church's teaching on the sacredness of life is well known. And yet, it is not as widely understood that our belief in the dignity of every life extends to criminal justice. Abolishing the death penalty is a pro-life issue. Catholic opposition to the death penalty is rooted in our teaching that every human being bears the image of God, regardless of the stage of life or circumstance. From the preborn, to the indigent, to the man on death row, the Catholic Church insists that every single human life deserves justice, respect, and mercy. It is the unequivocal teaching of the Catholic faith that the death penalty is "inadmissible."

For over forty-five years, the Catholic Conference of Ohio has advocated for the abolition of the death penalty. In that time, fifty-six unique human lives have been spent to provide, in the words of our Pope, a "false answer" to questions of public order and safety. The death penalty, Pope Francis observes, "does no more than introduce new elements of destruction in the fabric of national and global society." Therefore, it is the position of the Catholic Church in Ohio that the victims of crime and the citizens of this state deserve a system of justice which does not, through its own violence, memorialize the destruction of human life.

The Catholic bishops of Ohio recognize the immense harm that a crime causes victims, their families, and society, especially when a human life is lost. The Catholic Church stands in solidarity with victims' families, whose suffering is incalculable. The victims of crime deserve justice. For this reason, I ask for your support for HB 259, which would increase funding for the Attorney General's Crime Victim Compensation program. This legislation attends to the needs of victims and co-victims, who deserve more than the fallibility and brutality of capital punishment, and I urge you to support this bill out of care for those who suffer the effects of crime.

Others will come before you today to testify to the financial and practical perils of the death penalty. The Catholic Conference of Ohio urges you to also consider the moral and social consequences of capital punishment, which are grave so long as the death penalty remains a tool of our justice system.

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