



**Proponent Testimony SB 101
Catholic Conference of Ohio
Senate Judiciary Committee
November 15th, 2023**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Will Kuehnle, and I am an associate director with the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Catholic Conference is the official voice of the Catholic Church in Ohio on matters of public policy, and on behalf of the Catholic bishops of Ohio I urge your support for Senate Bill 101 to abolish the death penalty.

Two thousand years ago, a man suffered a state sponsored execution. Not just a man, but God in flesh. The death of Jesus Christ on a cross unveiled the evil of violence and proved the mercy of God. As the body of Christ, the Catholic Church, in Ohio and around the world, vehemently rejects the use of capital punishment, which disregards mercy, rejects redemption, and ignores the dignity of human life. Rather, the Catholic Church calls for a social order where the work of justice embraces tender acts of mercy, where our response to crime leads to renewal and redemption, and where every human life – no matter its circumstance, race, class, or stage of development – is cherished as an icon of our Creator.

To build the kingdom of God on earth means building a civilization of love, where we are obliged both to stand in solidarity with the victims of crime and at the same time maintain that abandoning mercy by terminating a life distorts the very justice victims deserve. We must never give up on one of these obligations for the other. And we know that God never tires of showing mercy, because, as Pope Francis says, “the name of God is mercy.” With the abolition of the death penalty in favor of life without parole, Ohio will enshrine both justice and the mercy of the God who brings rain on the just and the unjust.

Remember, also, the necessity of redemption as an aim of justice. Ohio can no longer tolerate a criminal justice system that declares that an individual is beyond redemption. Every society has a right to defend itself, yet the Catholic Church sees that today “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.” So, look to Christ on the cross, forgiving his executioners and even the thief sentenced to die with Him, and see that the fallibility of human judgments must not decide when a person has passed the possibility of repentance and redemption.

In every age, humanity is presented with the question: “What is the value of human life?” We are asking and answering this question every day. Is a human being valuable if they have a disability? Or if they are still in the womb? Even if they have committed a heinous crime? In every iteration of this question, the Catholic Church’s answer is a resounding “yes.” There can be no moral condition or exception to our belief that the human being on death row, living in the street, or growing in the womb bears the image of God.

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