

February 18, 2019

To: Montana House Judiciary Committee

From: Matthew Brower, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in support of HB 350

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower [B R O W E R] and I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference. I speak today on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Montana.

I am here today to voice our strong support for House Bill 350.

The Roman Catholic Church consistently affirms the dignity of the human person and the sacredness of every human life from the moment of conception through natural death. This foundational principle must serve as the bedrock of every just and moral society.

Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have all called for an end to the death penalty with Saint John Paul II famously stating on January 27, 1999, in St. Louis, Missouri:

“The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal I made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.”

Our position on the death penalty is coupled with a strong sense of solidarity with victims of violent crime and their families, whose lives and sense of well-being have been altered forever.

While there are a multitude of reasons the death penalty should be abolished, most significant is the damage it does to the very fabric of a just and moral society. As the U.S. Catholic Bishops have stated:

“We oppose capital punishment not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes but for what it does to all of us as a society. Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes all of us and is a sign of growing disrespect for human life. We cannot overcome crime by simply executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life.”

Finally, we hold that advances in public safety, including penal technology and the intensive management of prison populations, provide the means necessary to make the death penalty dated, obsolete, and unnecessary.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference, we urge a “do pass” and I thank you for your time.