

California Bishops Support Proposition 57 – the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act

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- *Punishment for its own sake is never an adequate response to crime*
- *Brings common sense to juvenile court proceedings*
- *Victims must have a central place in our justice system*

SACRAMENTO, CA – The California Catholic Conference (CCC) of Bishops offers its support for *Proposition 57: The Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act*. This balanced approach to the criminal justice system in our state would advance the well-being of our residents and communities by re-focusing our collective efforts on rehabilitation, treatment and education programs. In addition, the initiative will place the decision to try juveniles as adults into the hands of those who best understand the intricacies of dealing with young people – the juvenile court. Every day, in our parishes and ministries, we witness the devastating impact of crime on the people and families of our communities. Victims, whose lives have often been shattered, search for answers, look for healing and seek an opportunity to voice their needs. Families of perpetrators hide their pain, alone in their anguish and afraid to ask for help. And the incarcerated fruitlessly search for hope as programs that offer the possibility of rehabilitation are scrapped in lieu of the high costs of prison construction. Through chaplaincies, prison ministries, parish outreach and other efforts, people of faith respond to the Gospel call and minister to all people impacted by crime. But we can, and society must, do more. Proposition 57 is a much needed first step. Our public policies include many elements of punishment, but that is not sufficient to prevent crime, heal victims and restore relationships and harmony in society: [A] Catholic vision of crime and criminal justice can offer some alternatives. It recognizes that root causes and personal choices can both be factors in crime by understanding the need for responsibility on the part of the offender and an opportunity for their rehabilitation. A Catholic approach leads us to encourage models of restorative justice that seek to address crime in terms of the harm done to victims and communities, not simply as a violation of law. [*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective On Crime And Criminal Justice, A Statement by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000*] The threats to human dignity endemic to the current criminal justice situation in California demand our attention both as a people of faith and as residents of California. As we recognize and appreciate the dignity of others, together we build stronger, safer communities. Many policy initiatives like “three strikes” laws and longer and mandatory sentences have tried – and failed – to correct our dysfunctional criminal justice system. The lack of resources for crime prevention has only led to overcrowded prisons, foreseeable recidivism rates and unsafe communities. These policies often result from fear, a natural spontaneous response to violence. We are called to take more constructive action by designing policies that employ resources most effectively, are based on the best available research and offer reasoned approaches. Appropriate and wisely-developed policies – such as offered in Prop 57 – will actually result in safer communities rather than a continuous cycle of crime and incarceration. *The Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act* offers alternatives: an increase in public safety leading to less crime; programs to promote healing and rehabilitation; the means to deal with offending juveniles as the wounded children that they are; placing more decisions in the hands of impartial judges; and a chance at parole for non-violent offenders. In the Jubilee Year of Mercy, we have a special call to address the difficulties characteristic of our current criminal justice system. As

Pope Francis has said: In the broad context of human social relations, when we look to crime and punishment, we cannot help but think of the inhumane conditions in so many prisons, where those in custody are often reduced to a subhuman status in violation of their human dignity and stunted in their hope and desire for rehabilitation. The Church does much in these environments, mostly in silence. I exhort and I encourage everyone to do more, in the hope that the efforts being made in this area by so many courageous men and women will be increasingly supported, fairly and honestly, by the civil authorities as well. [World Day of Peace Message, 2014.] We respectfully urge the citizens of California to prayerfully and conscientiously study this situation and support the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act, Prop 57, on the November 2016 ballot.

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