



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 6, 2020

**HB 1480
Correctional Services – Elder Parole**

House Judiciary Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 1480, concerning the parole of certain elder inmates. The Catholic Conference represents the public-policy interests of the three (arch)diocese serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

Older inmates who have served much of their sentence merit a parole hearing to see if they are rehabilitated and can re-enter society. In *A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (2000), the Catholic Bishops state: *"We believe that both victims and offender are children of God. Despite their very different claims on society, their lives and dignity should be protected and respected. We seek justice, not vengeance. We believe punishment must have clear purposes: protecting society and rehabilitating those who violate the law."*

The Catholic Church roots much of its social justice teaching in the inherent dignity of every human person and the principals of forgiveness, redemption and restoration. Catholic doctrine provides that the criminal justice system should serve three principal purposes: (1) the preservation and protection of the common good of society, (2) the restoration of public order, and (3) the restoration or conversion of the offender. Thus, the Church recognizes the importance of striking a balance between protecting the common good and attentiveness to the rehabilitation of the incarcerated. The Conference submits that this legislation seeks to embody these principals and purposes, relative to intersection between our justice system and our communities, victims and offenders.

House Bill 1480 would allow for elder inmates who are at least 60 years old and have not been sentenced to life imprisonment or imprisonment for life without the possibility of parole, to be released on parole at any time during the term of the inmate's sentence. As Pope Francis recently remarked: *"Making someone pay for the errors of the past cannot mean canceling their hope for a future. In fact, everyone has the right to hope."* This bill would help provide hope for certain elderly inmates and give them the chance to return and make positive contributions to society.

The Maryland Catholic Conference thus urges this committee to return a favorable report on House Bill 1480.

