



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 22, 2022

**HB 920
Correctional Services – Medical Parole – Life Imprisonment**

House Judiciary Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 920. The Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

House Bill 920 would very simply expand access to medical parole for those serving life sentences. It would place within the purview of the parole commission to make the ultimate decision of granting medical parole to an inmate serving a life sentence.

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 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that “Abandoning the parole system, as some states have done, combined with the absence of a clear commitment to rehabilitation programs within prisons, turns prisons into warehouses where inmates grow old, without hope, their lives wasted.” (*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, USCCB, 2000) Pope Francis has also expressly labeled life imprisonment a “hidden death penalty”. (Address to the International Association of Penal Law, Oct. 2014)

Those serving sentences of life without parole are already subject to a lessened sense of hope and, thus, a more limited prospect of a restored life outside of prison. There is thus less incentive for the restoration and rehabilitation that should be inherent in systems of justice.

States should provide a greater degree of care for inmates who are elderly and/or suffering from debilitating medical conditions without access to proper care. This includes providing for their release to the community where warranted and where public safety is not a factor. Thus, the Maryland Catholic Conference urges a favorable report on House Bill 920.