



Indiana Catholic Conference

SB 155 Capital punishment and severe mental illness

It is well known that the Catholic Church opposes the use of the death penalty, unless it is absolutely necessary to defend life. While this bill does not eliminate the use of the death penalty, it does restrict its use and correct an injustice in its application. Hence, ICC supports the bill.

Catholic Church has long taught that an individual must have maturity and consciously choose an action for one to be morally responsible. Indiana no longer executes the intellectually handicapped or children because they may not be fully responsible for their actions. Those who are mentally ill have an impediment that limits their culpability regarding their actions also. As with the previous modifications in Indiana's application of the death penalty, this change to exempt the severely mentally ill from execution is prudent and just.

Outside of the opposition from a moral perspective, there are many practical and administrative problems with capital punishment. Prohibiting the use of the death penalty in circumstances where serve mental illness is a contributing factor in the crime will eliminate the costs and concerns associated with its application.

SB 155 does not exempt an individual from being held accountable. Rather, removing the death penalty as an option for punishment allows the state to fulfill its obligation to the public and to the individual. In Catholic teaching the state's duty is to protect the common good and to render an unjust aggressor unable to do harm. Also punishment, in addition to defending the public order and protecting people's safety, should have the effect of correcting the guilty party and providing restitution. SB 155 provides for public safety and does not take away an opportunity to correct and help the offender.

SB 155 is a positive step in reducing the application of the death penalty and thus prevents the mistakes and harm that an execution does not allow to be corrected. The Church has advocated for clemency on behalf of death row prisoners and especially so for those who suffer severe mental illness. We do so with profound sympathy for the loved ones of the victims and with condemnation of the terrible sin and grave crime of murder. Our appeal for clemency and passage of SB 155 is based on our conviction of the sacredness of human life as well as our concern of putting to death one who suffers from a grave mental illness.

ICC urges passage of SB 155.

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