

SB 185, To Abolish the Death Penalty and Replace it with Life without the Possibility of Parole House Judiciary Committee, March 15, 2011

My name is Moe Wosepka, and I am the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference of Bishops, which is the public policy arm of the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, and the Diocese of Helena. Together they represent an estimated 120,000 citizens who identify themselves as Roman Catholics in the State of Montana.

I appreciate the opportunity to share a couple thoughts with you today.

You heard today that many different groups and individuals approach abolition of the death penalty from different perspectives. For many Catholics, including me, the journey to support of abolition was a difficult process, but I stand before you today opposed to the death penalty. There are many reasons, but I will mention two that are the most important to me.

First as an advocate for life, I feel I must be consistent and support all life from conception to natural death. God created life in His image, so all life has an inherent value. I don't know what the value or purpose is of any life, and since I did not create that life, it is not up to me to decide when it should end. The Catholic Conference stands before this committee, and other committees in support of a variety of life bills, beginning life, assisted suicide, and the death penalty. Others feel differently than I do, perhaps that is OK. It is not for me to judge. But for me, support of all life including the smelly lives, the homeless, the man on death row, is seminal. All life was created by God, thus all life has value that only God can determine.

Second: I believe that Christ died on the Cross to redeem us of our sins, not just some sins, not just little sins, but big sins as well.

The Catholic Church's position acknowledges every person as redeemable and every soul salvageable. The Sacrifice of the Cross promises redemption for all that seek it. Thus we should not interrupt that opportunity for redemption especially for those that have done great wrongs in their lives.

In sum, the Catholic Bishops in the State of Montana stand in support of Senate Bill 185, to abolish the death penalty in favor of life in prison without the possibility of parole. We hold that this bill secures public safety, promotes restorative justice, provides moral constancy, and helps to break the tragic cycle of violence.

We ask you, the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to please support Senate bill 185.