



April 14, 2015

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley and Ranking Member Leahy:

On behalf of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities USA, we write to encourage support for the “Corrections Oversight, Recidivism Reduction, and Eliminating Costs for Tax-payers in Our National System Act of 2015” (CORRECTIONS Act, S.467). Although the bill could be improved, it will still help stimulate conversation about how to reform our nation’s broken criminal justice system.

More than 650,000 men, women and juveniles reenter society each year from federal and state prisons, local jails and detention centers. They face a myriad of challenges such as homelessness, obtaining the skills necessary to find gainful employment, and substance abuse and mental health challenges. Simply incarcerating people for unnecessarily lengthy sentences does not keep communities safe, increase the likelihood of true rehabilitation, nor meet our obligations to help restore our brothers and sisters to their communities.

The CORRECTIONS Act of 2015 attempts to combat recidivism, provide incentives to reduce lengthy sentences, and assist those reentering society:

- Calls for partnerships with faith-based, community and non-profit organizations to provide recidivism reduction and recovery programs on a paid and volunteer basis;
- Provides essential recidivism and reentry programs which may include: life skills classes, mentoring, domestic violence deterrence classes, occupational and vocational training, assistance with finding housing and employment and substance abuse treatment and mental health treatment, and;
- Provides a strategy to reinvest budget savings resulting from this act back into recidivism and reduction programs.

The CORRECTIONS Act will also require the essential appropriations to ensure it is able to carry out its intended effect to adequately assist those working to improve their lives and become full members in their communities again.

Our Catholic tradition supports the community's right to establish and enforce laws that protect people and advance the common good. But our faith also teaches us that both victims and

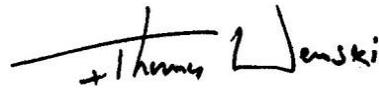
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offenders have a God-given dignity that calls for justice and restoration. The bishops of the United States, in their 2000 pastoral statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, stated, “Just as God never abandons us, so too we must be in covenant with one another. We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or re-integration of all into the community.”

Pope Francis has cautioned against a mentality that believes that public punishment alone “can resolve the most disparate social problems as if completely different diseases could be treated with the same medicine.” We join the Holy Father by continuing to advocate for effective reforms to our nation’s criminal justice system that will lead to healing and restoration, rather than simply punishment.

Faithfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'T'.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna J. Markham, OP, PhD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'D'.

Sr. Donna Markham, OP
President-Elect,
Catholic Charities USA