



**Testimony**  
**SB 5476 – Abolishing the Death Penalty**  
**Senate Judiciary Committee**  
**January 22, 2010**

My name is Josephine Tamayo Murray. I am here this afternoon on behalf of the Washington State Catholic Conference, which represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State on issues of public policy. The Catholic Conference respectfully urges you to support the passage of SB 5476, abolishing the death penalty in Washington State.

It is important to note that just last year, in 2009, the Catholic Bishops of Washington State called for a moratorium on the death penalty in a document entitled, *A Pastoral Statement on the Death Penalty in Washington State*. The Bishops begin their statement by asking questions about the death penalty: “Is it fairly applied? Are innocent people executed? Are our motives revenge or safety? Is the punishment of death a necessary means of ensuring public safety?”

In framing their opposition to the death penalty the Bishops state: “First and foremost our pastoral responsibilities call us to comfort and care for victims’ families, friends and loved ones in response to the crime of murder. We reaffirm our commitment to console these secondary victims of violence by ensuring a welcoming presence within the Church to love and support them. We also join our voices with all other citizens in the demand that we are protected from those who would commit murder. “

They further state, “When someone is murdered, their death cries out for a response, but violence in response to violence only perpetuates the illusion that cruelty and the taking of human life can balance the scales of justice. We therefore call upon Catholics, all citizens and our state leaders to find appropriate methods and means to protect innocent life from those who would commit murder. We further acknowledge that in the most extreme cases of violent murder, the sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole can be an appropriate sentence.”

State Legislatures across the country are considering proposals to review their use of the death penalty. These efforts have been prompted by the increasing concern over the potential for innocent people to be sentenced to death and executed. Additional concerns include the vastly disproportionate percentage of death sentences for those whose victims were white, and the inability of many capital defendants to afford adequate representation. In Washington State there is also the impact of the Gary Ridgeway case that raises serious concerns about proportionality of any death sentences that might be handed down in the future.

The unnecessary use of the death penalty erodes our respect for human life. Given the finality of capital punishment, we ask public officials to dedicate themselves to the eradication of violence in the cause of justice.

Again, in the name of the Catholic Bishops of Washington State, I urge you to support the passage of SB 5476.

Thank you for your consideration.