



**Testimony
SB 5456 – Eliminating the Death Penalty
Senate Judiciary Committee
January 9, 2011**

My name is John Geis. I am the Legislative Director 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 5456, eliminating the death penalty in Washington State.

In 2009, the Catholic Bishops of Washington State restated their opposition to 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. In keeping with our call as disciples of Jesus, we bishops have committed the pastoral resources of our parish communities to care for those who have been deprived of the life of a loved one by an act of violence. We reaffirm our commitment to console these secondary victims of murder We also join our voices with all other citizens in the demand that all of us be protected from those who would commit murder.”*

They further state: *“We are keenly aware that some consider our opposition to the death penalty a muted response to the crime of murder because it falls short of the demands of true justice. Despite our opposition to the death penalty as a punishment for murder, we neither condone any crime of violence nor suggest unmitigated leniency for those who commit such crimes. Our respect for human life compels us to condemn the crime of murder unequivocally, and we give our full support to the development of effective sentencing alternatives for this most grievous crime.”*

“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 search for appropriate methods to protect innocent life from those who would commit murder. We pledge our assistance for every effort to obtain justice based on respect for human life and the inherent dignity of every person. As we have in the past, we 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. “

Again, in the name of the Catholic Bishops of Washington State, I urge you to support the passage of SB 5456. Thank you for your consideration.