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S.B. 1035 *An Act Repealing the Death Penalty*

Monday, March 7, 2011

Testimony of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Connecticut
By The Most Rev. Peter A. Rosazza, Retired Auxiliary Bishop of Hartford

I am Bishop Peter A. Rosazza, retired auxiliary bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford representing the seven Roman Catholic Bishops of Connecticut. We express our united voice in support of the abolition of the death penalty.

We do so because the Gospel of Jesus Christ mandates that we respect all human life from conception to natural death. Over the years, the Bishops of Connecticut have time and again advocated for the abolition of the death penalty. For example, several years ago we produced 39,000 signatures of Catholics throughout the state who oppose the death penalty. Then in 2005 we joined with our brother bishops throughout our country who said on Holy Thursday: "The death penalty diminishes all of us. Its use ought to be abandoned, not only for what it does to those who are executed but what it does to us as a society. We cannot teach respect for life by taking life."

At the same time we are deeply concerned for the just and fair treatment of all parties in this matter: the victims and their families as well as those who have been accused or convicted of grave crimes. Next, we are motivated by the consistent ethic of life, a concept in accord with the teaching of Pope John Paul II (*Evangelium vitae*, #87). Human life is a gift from God that must be respected from conception to natural death. Our profound respect for human life also explains why we are opposed to abortion and euthanasia as well as being, next to the government, the largest provider of social services including those for the poor, the sick and the elderly in Connecticut.

Pope John Paul II also taught that society has the right to protect itself. Thus civil authority must redress the violation of personal and social rights by imposing on the offender an adequate punishment of the crime. In this way, authority also fulfills the purpose of defending public order and ensuring peoples' safety while offering the

offender an incentive to help change his or her behavior and be rehabilitated. Thus one hopes that offenders will come to repent of the evil they have committed and be reconciled to the victims' families whose lives they have devastated.

Another reason for abolishing the death penalty is the increasing number of cases where innocent people have either been executed or exonerated. Furthermore we are deeply concerned that so many persons in prisons and especially on death row are poor, young and minorities who are less likely to be able to avail themselves of legal talent.

In conclusion, while conceding that the state has the duty to maintain public order and the right to punish convicted criminals, we express our considered opposition to the death penalty in the State of Connecticut. We join with other leaders of faith communities, here present, and with the Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty, in this concerted effort to abolish the death penalty in our state.