



**DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND
WORLD PEACE**

**Catholic
Charities
USA**



November 13, 2007

The House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities USA, we strongly urge you to support HR. 1593, the *Second Chance Act of 2007*. This important legislation is a good first step in addressing some of the many issues facing more than 650,000 men and women who re-enter society each year from federal and state prisons, as well as the thousands more who reenter from local jails everyday.

Unfortunately, too few of those who return to our communities from prison or jail are prepared for their release or receive any supportive services beyond a bus ticket and a few days' spending money. One-third of all corrections departments provide no funds whatsoever to prisoners upon release. In addition, many of those leaving jail and prison suffer from chronic health problems, have no housing, little education or job training, and generally lack the supportive services needed for a successful re-entry. However, research shows that supportive services are critical to an individual's safe and successful reentry; barriers and a lack of such services mean that few are able to access assistance. As a result, it is estimated that sixty-seven percent of persons released from state prisons are arrested for new crimes within the first three years after release.

As Catholic Christians, we actively support the community's right to establish and enforce laws that protect people and advance the common good. However, our faith teaches us that both victims and offenders have a God given dignity that calls for justice not vengeance. As the Bishops stated in their 2000 pastoral statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*:

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.

We believe the *Second Chance Act of 2007* is a significant first step toward creating a more just criminal justice system. HR. 1593 will help to reduce recidivism rates by using common sense solutions, such as:

- Providing grants to states and local governments to develop and/or adopt procedures to ensure that dangerous felons are not released from prison prematurely.

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- Providing grants to nonprofit organizations for mentoring adult offenders and providing transitional services for re-integration into the community.
- Creating a federal interagency taskforce to identify programs and resources on re-entry, and ways to better collaborate; develop interagency initiatives and a national re-entry research agenda; review and report to Congress on the federal barriers that exist to successful re-entry with recommendations.
- Establishing a national resource center for states, local governments, service providers, faith-based organizations, and corrections and community organizations to collect and disseminate best practices and provide training and support around reentry.
- Providing grants to states and local governments that may be used to expand family-based treatment centers that offer family-based comprehensive treatment services for parents and their children as a complete family unit.

We urge Congress to act promptly to pass this important legislation. It not only will enhance public safety but it will improve the quality of life in communities across the country.

Faithfully yours,



Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Rev. Larry Snyder
President, Catholic Charities USA