



October 16, 2017

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Conyers:

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 in support of the Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2017 (H.R. 2899). Society's care and concern needs to focus on the hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children who return to society after a period of incarceration.

In August, Pope Francis released a video message to prisoners in Argentina who were taking university classes during their detention. The Holy Father explained that in order for punishment to bear fruit in society, it must contain the promise of hope for new life:

The inmates are serving a sentence, a sentence for a mistake they have made. But let us not forget that for punishment to be fruitful there must be a horizon of hope; otherwise it remains closed in on itself and is simply an instrument of torture; it is not fruitful. Punishment with hope, so it is fruitful. Hope for social reintegration, and for this, social formation, looking to the future . . .¹

For decades, the American Catholic bishops have promoted a restorative justice approach, as stated in their 2000 pastoral letter, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*. The Church knows what it takes to help those returning from prison to find their footing and reintegrate into the community. In 2016, Catholic Charities served over 25,000 persons returning from prison, helping them overcome barriers to finding employment and stable housing, as well as assisting them with challenges related to

¹ Pope Francis, Video Message to the Centre for Student Inmates at the Prison Complex of Ezeiza (Argentina) (August 24, 2017). https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170824_videomessaggio-penitenziario-ezeiza.html

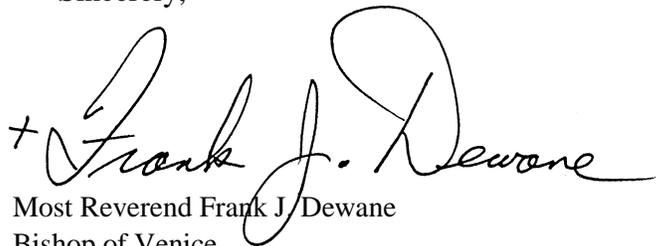
mental health and addiction. The Second Chance Reauthorization Act is crucial in this effort, as the Act will:

- Revise and reauthorize grant programs for substance abuse treatment and education in prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities;
- Reauthorize grant programs for technology career training and mentoring;
- Reauthorize and modify eligibility for an elderly early release pilot program; and
- Help establish partnerships between prisons and faith- or community-based nonprofit organizations to conduct activities to reduce recidivism.

In short, the Second Chance Reauthorization Act helps to fund programs that give hope to those with a difficult path in front of them, including needs for employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, victim support, and other services to individuals returning to the community from prison or jail.

It is in the best interest of the safety of the community as well as the development of returning citizens to continue support for programs that help provide a “horizon of hope” for all involved in the criminal justice system. It is an essential step for Congress to pass the Second Chance Reauthorization Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank J. Dewane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "F".

Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice

Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna J. Markham, OP, Ph.D.". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Sister Donna Markham, OP, Ph.D.
President & CEO
Catholic Charities USA