



July 07, 2014

The Honorable Patti B. Saris
U.S. Sentencing Commission
One Columbia Circle NE, Suite 2-500
Washington, DC 20002-8002

Dear Chair Saris:

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 to express our support for your efforts to correct the current flawed federal drug sentencing guidelines in what is termed the “drugs minus two” fix. We thank you for these efforts and ask that you make these changes retroactive. By applying this correction retroactively, you will help address broken sentencing guidelines that have resulted in excessive sentences for 51,000 federal drug offenders sentenced since 1987.

The United States imprisons more people per capita than any other nation in the world at a cost of approximately \$80 billion annually. In 2011, approximately 7 million people were under some form of correctional control with 2.2 million incarcerated in federal, state or local prisons. Available data shows the impact of these policies disproportionately impact poor people and minorities resulting in great financial cost to society but more importantly, a cost in broken lives.

Rigid sentences for non-violent offenses are not only costly and ineffective, but can be detrimental to the good of persons, families, and communities. Prolonged incarceration often contributes to family instability and poverty and can contribute to recidivism.

Our Catholic tradition supports the community's right to establish and enforce laws that protect people and advance the common good. But our faith teaches us that both victims and offenders have a God-given dignity that calls for justice and restoration, not vengeance. Contrition, restitution and rehabilitation can better serve the cause of justice than simply punishment for the sake of punishment.

We join with Pope Francis who reminds us that, “God is in everyone’s life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else—God is in this person’s life.” As the bishops of the United States stated in their 2000 pastoral statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, “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 thank you and the Commission’s commitment to the safety of our communities and to justice. Please continue to promote justice in sentencing policies by making the “drug minus two” amendment retroactive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski".

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Larry Snyder".

Rev. Larry Snyder
President,
Catholic Charities USA