



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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July 8, 2015

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Leahy:

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 urge you to support the *Second Chance Act (S.1513)*. This legislation is an important step in addressing some of the many issues facing the more than 650,000 men, women and juveniles who reenter society each year from federal and state prisons, and local jails and detention centers every day.

Our Catholic tradition supports the community's right to establish and enforce laws that protect people and advance the common good. But our faith also teaches us that both victims and offenders have a God-given dignity that calls for justice, not vengeance. The bishops of the United States in their 2000 pastoral statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, stated, "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."

Those who return to our communities from incarceration face significant challenges. These include finding housing and stable employment, high rates of substance abuse, physical and mental health challenges and social isolation. Without necessary critical support services these persons have an increased chance of re-offending causing harm to society and increasing our nation's prison costs.

The Second Chance Act supports much needed programs in government agencies and nonprofit organizations that provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, victim support and other services to individuals returning to the community from prison or jail.

These programs have proven effective and help reduce recidivism rates by using common sense solutions, such as:

- Providing grants to nonprofit organizations for mentoring adult offenders and providing transitional services for re-integration into the community;

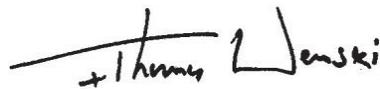
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- Providing separate planning and implementation grants to ensure that projects are well developed and informed by research and best practices;
- Supporting a federal interagency taskforce to identify programs and resources on reentry, and ways to better collaborate; develop interagency initiatives and a national reentry research agenda; review and report to Congress on the federal barriers that exist to successful reentry with recommendations;
- Supporting 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.

Pope Francis recently said, “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.” We join the pope by advocating for those who are leaving incarceration and urge Congress to pass this important legislation. It will not only enhance public safety by providing the necessary resources to address prisoner reentry and recidivism, but promote human dignity by improving the quality of life in communities across the country.

Faithfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

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

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

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