

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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INFORMATION AND NEWS RELEASE

July 1, 1994

CATHOLIC BISHOPS STATEMENT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Once again, legislation regarding the restoration of capital punishment in Massachusetts, has been put before the Great and General Court. In the past (1982, 1984 & 1985), the four Diocesan Roman Catholic Bishops of the Commonwealth have publicly opposed such a move. This position remains the same in 1994.

We affirm the traditional teaching of the Church that the state has the right to inflict capital punishment in cases of extremely serious crimes for the sake of the common good. It must be noted however, that the Church has never taught that the state has an obligation to exercise this right.

We understand the mounting pressure there is in our Commonwealth for passage of this legislation. We, however, are concerned that the exercise of this right, in our society at this moment in time, will feed into the escalating cycle of violence which all of us deplore.

We maintain that society has a serious responsibility to find the best means to foster protection for its citizens and regard for the law. We are not convinced that the restoration of capital punishment, of itself, affords an adequate response. Moreover, we recognize that the application of this penalty historically has impacted more adversely, the poor and minorities. In its stead, we advocate swift and sure justice and appropriate sentencing for the protection of all people. We renew our call for both prison and judicial reform in the Commonwealth.

Any reasonable doubt concerning the imposition of capital punishment should be resolved in favor of the right to life possessed by each and every human person.

+ His Eminence, Bernard Cardinal Law
Archbishop of Boston

+ Most Reverend John Marshall
Bishop of Springfield

+ Most Reverend Timothy Harrington
Bishop of Worcester

+ Most Reverend Sean O'Malley
Bishop of Fall River

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