

# Massachusetts Bishops Issue Statement Against Death Penalty, Feb. 2001

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

*PRESS RELEASE*

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## **Catholic Bishops To Issue Statement, Testify At Legislative Hearing Regarding Death Penalty**

The four Roman Catholic Bishops of the Dioceses of Springfield, Worcester, Fall River, and the Archdiocese of Boston will issue a joint statement against the reinstatement of the death penalty in Massachusetts during a State House hearing on the death penalty.

Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of the Diocese of Worcester will personally submit the joint statement on behalf of Bernard Cardinal Law, Bishop Sean P. O'Malley, and Bishop Thomas Dupre, as well as the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, when he testifies before the Joint Committee on Criminal Justice on Tuesday, February 20, 2001, at the Gardner Auditorium.

The joint statement will assert that it "is time to put aside capital punishment once and for all" and will urge the Legislature to continue "searching for ever more mature forms of safeguarding life and preserving human dignity."

February 20, 2001

## **MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC BISHOPS' STATEMENT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

In the two years since the Massachusetts General Court last addressed the death penalty issue, much has happened to change the climate. New studies documenting the substantial risk of error in identifying the truly guilty, recent reports of innocent persons wrongly sent to death row being released, and the powerful stories of relatives of murder victims calling for forgiveness, not revenge, have helped to create a more reasoned and less fervid tone in the debate. Appeals for a moratorium in those jurisdictions that employ the death penalty are increasing and opinion surveys document the dropping support among the public for the idea that killing is somehow an appropriate response to killing.

The Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts have spoken out against the death penalty since 1980, when its reinstatement was first proposed. We repeat what we shared with the Legislature in 1999:

The death penalty is simply wrong. It solves no problem. It renders us ever more callous as a society to human life. . . It is true that no person and no family should feel unprotected. All of us have the right to live with a sense of peace and security in our own homes and neighborhoods.

Criminals should be quickly apprehended and swiftly punished. . . . capital punishment, however, must be rejected as unworthy of us as a civilized people and unnecessary for us as a society protected by adequate judicial means. . . . [I]t is time to put aside capital punishment once and for all.

Our words echo the words of Pope John Paul II who has repeatedly called for an end to the use of capital punishment. In the last two years, at least four countries have abolished the death penalty. An international movement, led by the Rome Saint Egidio community, has given symbol to their opposition to the death penalty. They have the Roman Colosseum illuminated every time the death penalty is repealed.

The Holy Father observed that the "Colosseum Lights Up Life" campaign, in conjunction with the Catholic Church's Great Jubilee for the year 2000, provided "an excellent opportunity to promote in the world ever more mature forms of respect for the life and dignity of every person" and he urged "all leaders to reach an international consensus on the abolition of the death penalty." [John Paul II, Remarks Following the Angelus, Sunday, Dec. 12, 1999.]

The Jubilee Year has ended, but the cause of life remains before us still. You, as legislators of the Massachusetts Commonwealth, have the opportunity to advance this cause and to continue searching for "ever more mature forms" of safeguarding life and preserving human dignity.

Once again, the Bishops of Massachusetts wish to record their constant and consistent opposition to the death penalty.

+His Eminence, Bernard Cardinal Law Archbishop of Boston

+Most Reverend Sean O'Malley Bishop of Fall River

+Most Reverend Thomas Dupre Bishop of Springfield

+Most Reverend Daniel Reilly Bishop of Worcester