

January 23, 2019

To: Montana House Judiciary Committee

From: Matthew Brower, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in support of HB 215

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower [B R O W E R] and I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference. I speak today on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Montana.

I am here today to voice our support for House Bill 215.

The Roman Catholic Church consistently affirms the dignity of the human person and the sacredness of every human life. Every person has an inherent dignity, value and worth. This dignity is not something earned by our good behavior but rather something we all enjoy by virtue of the fact we are children of God. It is imperative that society recognize, promote, safeguard and defend this dignity for all, with no exceptions.

The Catholic Bishops of the United States, in their statement *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* stated:

“We bishops cannot support policies that treat young offenders as though they are adults. The actions of the most violent youth leave us shocked and frightened and therefore they should be removed from society until they are no longer dangerous. But society must never respond to children who have committed crimes as though they are somehow equal to adults—fully formed in conscience and fully aware of their actions. Placing children in adult jails is a sign of failure, not a solution. In many instances, such terrible behavior points to our own negligence in raising children with a respect for life, providing a nurturing and loving environment, or addressing serious mental or emotional illnesses.”

House Bill 215 represents an attempt to combat recidivism among young offenders and provide a more solid foundation from which such youth can learn from their mistakes and choose to embrace a future marked by mercy, justice and hope. For their benefit and that of society as a whole, youth offenders ought to be provided the best opportunity for true rehabilitation and re-integration. Prohibiting incarceration within adult facilities is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference, I urge a “do pass” and thank you for your time.