

Testimony HB 452 Achievement Credit for Parolees

Madam Chair Rice and members of the committee:

My name is Moe Wosepka; I currently serve as Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference, which represents the Catholic Bishops on public policy issues.

I stand before you today to support this bill and thank Representative Kottel for bringing it forward.

For the past 10 years I have worked with the poor and the homeless on our streets, as well as the forgotten and the ignored in our prisons, and jails. I am part of a group that visits them while incarcerated, and works with them when they are released into our communities. All I know is from personal experience.

I was amazed when I first started going into the prisons that the place is full of poor people. I knew these people on the street and I knew their families. I had been working with their families on the streets.

Besides being poor, those who are incarcerated are the uneducated or undereducated, have poor job skills, have chemical and other addictions, and are mentally ill. They are the ones who have trouble on our streets today, even before going to prison.

And most of them will be on the streets again. The majority of those under the supervision of the Department of Corrections are in our towns and cities already. I believe it is in the best interest of all that we do what we can to help them become successful, and reintegrate into our communities.

Success leads to more and greater success. I have found that encouraging those I work with to make good decisions, and then to congratulate them when they do, builds self esteem, and leads to even greater success. This bill does that. We should encourage those who are working to improve themselves and we should congratulate them on their successes. One such way would be to allow some form of "good time".

This approach is in line with Catholic Social Teaching. Pope John Paul II was quoted as saying, "We are still a long way from the time when our conscience can be certain of having done everything possible to prevent crime and to control it effectively so that it no longer does harm and, at the same time, to offer to those who commit crimes a way of redeeming themselves and making a positive return to society. If all those is some way involved in the problem tried to develop this line of thought, perhaps humanity as a whole would take a great step forward in creating a more serene and peaceful society."

Those who are not successful in a positive way when they return to our streets are more likely to re-offend. It is our goal to provide a positive option for those who return to our communities that will encourage them to be successful citizens. We believe this is in the best interests of all. The Montana Catholic Conference urges your support. Thank you.