



Massachusetts Catholic Conference
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December 6, 2016

The Honorable Charles D. Baker, Jr.
Governor
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Stanley C. Rosenberg
Senate President
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants
Supreme Judicial Court
John Adams Courthouse
One Pemberton Square
Suite 2500
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Criminal Justice Reform Legislation

Dear Governor Baker, Senate President Rosenberg, Speaker DeLeo and Chief Justice Gants;

As we approach the Holiday Season and the beginning of a new Legislative Session next month, we, the four Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts, urge you to join together as one and file comprehensive legislation that reforms our criminal justice system for criminal offenders.

The Council of State Governments Justice Center will be issuing its long awaited report within the next several weeks. It is expected to provide a blueprint for these important legislative reforms. While acknowledging this type of legislation will be multi-faceted, covering many layers of the judicial system, we certainly hope and expect that the report and subsequent legislation, at a minimum, will recognize and address the following critical areas that offenders face every day under the current judicial system:

- (1) Repeal the excessively long mandatory minimum jail sentences for non-violent drug convictions by empowering judges to hand down a sentence for offenders on a case by case basis and determined by the specific facts and circumstances of each case.
- (2) Promote, create and fund diversion to “treatment programs” rather than “imprisonment” for offenders suffering from substance abuse. This is particularly critical as we face the deadly and growing opioid abuse crises in Massachusetts.

- (3) Increase funding for both in-prison programs for drug abuse and mental health services, education and job training as well as re-entry programs for job training, placement, drug treatment, mental health services and housing.
- (4) Reform the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) system by reducing the period of time potential employers have access to an individual's criminal records. The current system is designed to provide "roadblocks" to successful rehabilitation, employment opportunities and assimilation back into society by individuals attempting to turn their lives around.
- (5) Streamline and simplify parole eligibility and the cumbersome system currently in place for granting parole. For example, a preliminary report issued earlier this year suggests that on average 206 days accrue between the grant of an inmate parole and his/her release.

There are approximately twenty thousand people in our state's jails and prisons. Many of those people are repeat offenders who need our help! Adopting comprehensive thoughtful reforms will reduce recidivism and incarcerations rates for offenders (particularly non-violent offenders) and provide the path for many of them to be productive members of our society.

We must come together in 2017 as Legislators, Justices, Church Leaders and many more groups and individuals across our great Commonwealth to put in place a new system which will provide these individuals the support they need and a new hope for the future.

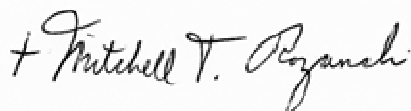
Very truly yours,



His Eminence Seán P. O'Malley, OFM Cap.
Archbishop of Boston



Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester



Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski
Bishop of Springfield



Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV
Bishop of Fall River