



## Department of Social Development and World Peace

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July 26, 2006

House Judiciary Committee  
2138 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6143

Dear Representative:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is a strong supporter of H.R. 1704, the *Second Chance Act of 2005*. We actively support the community's right to establish and enforce laws that protect people and advance the common good. However, our faith teaches us that both victims and offenders have a God given dignity that calls for justice not vengeance. As the Bishops stated in their 2000 pastoral statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*:

Just as God never abandons us, so too we must be in covenant with one another. We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or re-integration of all into the community.

This important bill begins to address some of the many issues facing more than 600,000 men and women who re-enter society each year from federal and state prisons, as well as the thousands more who reenter from local jails everyday.

I understand an amendment has been offered in Committee to add a rule of construction prohibiting discrimination against faith-based organizations. While grateful that Committee members are sensitive to the concerns of faith-based organizations and their ability to partner with government to help inmates and their families, I do not believe that this amendment is necessary. I am also concerned the amendment, if adopted, could threaten the ultimate passage of the bill.

The current language in the bill is the result of a delicate compromise reached after long negotiations between Republicans, Democrats and faith-based groups, including the bishops' conference. We are confident this language is sufficient to ensure that faith-based groups will be able to participate fully in the programs established by the Second Chance Act.

I therefore request that you oppose any amendments to H.R. 1704 that would change the bill's language dealing with faith-based organizations, and ask that you vote to approve H.R. 1704 as it is currently drafted.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.  
Bishop of Brooklyn  
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee