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Michigan Catholic Conference Speaks Out Against Death Penalty Amendment *‘Capital Punishment is a Simplistic Solution to Complex Problems’*

LANSING – Contending that government should neither be in the business of state-sponsored murder nor establish public policy in response to a specific occurrence, the Michigan Catholic Conference testified today against House Joint Resolution W before the House Regulatory Reform Committee. HJR W is a constitutional amendment that would reinstate the death penalty in Michigan.

“The Michigan Catholic Conference stands unequivocally against any measure that seeks to reinstate the death penalty in our state, and will vigorously oppose legislation that attempts to establish a culture of death in Michigan,” said Paul A. Long, MCC Vice-President for Public Policy. “We do not challenge society’s right to punish the serious and violent offender. But, to serve as an effective deterrent to crime, any punishment must be swift, sure and even handed. Capital punishment fails in all these categories.”

In order to successfully amend the Michigan Constitution, HJR W must receive two-thirds support from the House and Senate as well as the approval of voters on a statewide ballot. Support for the death penalty has waned nation-wide due to the State of Illinois discovering that numerous individuals on death row were innocent of their alleged crimes. In Michigan, HJR W was introduced within days of two Detroit police officers being fatally shot during a routine traffic stop.

“Public policy should never be developed in response to a specific occurrence, no matter how gruesome and heinous,” Long testified before the committee. “Public policy must be developed with the common good as the central theme under girded in the belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person. The restoration of the death penalty is a simplistic solution to complex problems.”

The State of Michigan has a proud and long-standing tradition of opposing capital punishment. In 1846 Michigan became the first English-speaking jurisdiction to outlaw capital punishment, and in 1963 the citizens of Michigan approved a new state constitution, which banned the penalty. Since its advocacy during the 1961 Constitutional Convention, the Michigan Catholic Conference has voiced its opposition to capital punishment during various ballot initiatives and several legislative committees.

The Michigan Catholic Conference is the public policy voice for the Catholic Church in this state.

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