



February 13, 2014

Governor Jay Inslee
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor,

The Catholic bishops of Washington State thank you for your decision to impose a moratorium on the death penalty during your term of office. We further applaud your call for a public conversation on capital punishment.

As the pastoral leaders of more than 1 million Catholics in Washington State, we favor abolishing the death penalty, but also recognize the obstacles to achieving that goal. We therefore pledge our assistance by working to raise awareness among Catholic people and all people of good will about the moral and practical reasons for ending executions in our state.

We are well positioned to assist you in this effort and we think you would find valuable support in the Washington State Catholic Conference's past statements regarding the death penalty. In fact, our most recent statement released in 2009 called into question the justification for the use of capital punishment which you alluded to in announcing your moratorium. At that time we wrote: "The people of Washington are confronted with unanswered questions regarding capital punishment. Is it fairly applied? Are innocent people executed? Are our motives revenge or safety? Is the punishment of death a cost effective means of ensuring public safety?"

You have taken a positive step by temporarily halting executions in Washington State, and we hope this will lead to a fruitful discussion about the dignity of human life, help us find answers to the compelling questions surrounding the death penalty and eventually lead to permanently abolishing the practice of executions in Washington State.

As you stated, we also recognize that criminals must be answerable for their crimes. The state must hold murderers accountable for taking an innocent human life, but also for the great suffering and pain they have inflicted on the victims' family and friends that will last a lifetime. The real tragedy of criminal murders, however, is that there is no way to rebalance the scales of justice, no way to bring life back to those who have been murdered or to restore them to their grieving families. When the state imposes the death penalty, it proclaims that taking one human life counterbalances the taking of another life. This assumption is profoundly mistaken.

If there is any lesson we need to learn in our day, it is that taking a human life in the name of retribution does not breed justice or bring closure, but only continues the cycle of violence and hatred. Nothing can restore a human life. In your efforts as chief executive of our state, in our efforts as pastors and through the many institutions of civil society, together we must seek the most effective means to achieve justice, while at the same time turning away from violence as a solution to social problems.

Be assured of our prayers and support for you as you assist the people of our state to resolve this issue in a manner that reflects God's law of justice and mercy.

Sincerely,

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Archbishop J. Peter Sartain
Archdiocese of Seattle

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Bishop Blase J. Cupic
Diocese of Spokane

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Bishop Joseph J. Tyson
Diocese of Yakima

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Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S.
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle