



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF ASSEMBLY BILL 660: JUVENILE JUSTICE
Presented to the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
By Barbara Sella, Associate Director
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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) strongly supports Assembly Bill 660, which would return first-time, nonviolent 17-year-old offenders to the juvenile justice system.

The bill is consistent with the principles outlined in 1999 by Wisconsin's Catholic bishops in their statement, *Public Safety, the Common Good, and the Church: A Statement on Crime and Punishment in Wisconsin*, respect for the human person, common good, option for the poor and marginalized, restoration, and solidarity.

Furthermore, in their 2000 statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, the U.S. bishops were explicit in their opposition to treating young offenders as adults:

The actions of the most violent youth leave us shocked and frightened and therefore they should be removed from society until they are no longer dangerous. But society must never respond to children who have committed crimes as though they are somehow equal to adults – fully formed in conscience and fully aware of their actions. Placing children in adult jails is a sign of failure, not a solution. In many instances, such terrible behavior points to our own negligence in raising children with a respect for life, providing a nurturing and loving environment, or addressing serious mental or emotional illnesses.

Adult institutions are simply not appropriate places for nonviolent juveniles. The risk of abuse at the hands of adult inmates is too high, as is the risk of re-offending.

Juvenile offenders must be held accountable, but in a way that serves to rehabilitate them in an age-appropriate manner and eventually re-integrate them into the community.

We therefore strongly urge you to support Assembly Bill 660. Thank you.