



The CAMPAIGN for the
FAIR SENTENCING
of YOUTH

To: Members of the Michigan Legislature

Re: Statement of Michigan Faith Leaders in Support of SB 119-23 & HB 4160-64, Abolishing Life without the Possibility of Parole for People 18 and Younger

Distinguished Members of the Michigan Legislature,

We are writing as leaders of the Michigan faith community to add our voices to the movement to end life without the possibility of parole as a sentencing option for people aged 18 and younger. With the introduction of SB 119-23 & HB 4160-64, Michigan has the opportunity to join 27 other states and jurisdictions, including Arkansas, the Dakotas, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia, in affirming that no youth should ever be told that they have no hope but to die in prison.

As people of faith, we respect the dignity of every human being and strive for justice for all people as image-bearers of God. Youth in particular are deserving of our compassion and concern, as they simultaneously represent the most vulnerable members of our community and our most valuable resource as we work for a more just future. When young people cause harm, it is important to hold them accountable in age-appropriate, trauma-informed ways that leave room for the profound potential that they have to move beyond their worst moments and experience dramatic positive transformation. A belief in redemption and second chances lies at the heart of our faith traditions, and we must put in place youth sentencing policies that are in harmony with the fundamental truth that people change, that God changes people. Our faith teaches us that we are, all of us, more than the worst thing we have ever done, particularly when we were 15, 16, 17, or 18 years old. When a person who has served a lengthy sentence for a crime she or he committed as a teenager is able to demonstrate rehabilitation, we must give them

an opportunity to lean into the future God has in store for them outside prison walls.

When someone suffers harm, particularly when a life is lost, we mourn with those who mourn. And when the person who caused the harm repents and shows that they can contribute to and serve their communities in positive ways, we should rejoice as when something that once was lost is found.

Our scriptures and even our songs affirm that every young person is cherished by God. They are precious in his sight. Therefore every youth matters. Every young person is worthy of our care and concern. As faith leaders, we encourage you to support legislation that will end the practice of sentencing kids to die in prison and provide meaningful opportunities for redemption.

Bishop David Bard, Bishop of the Michigan Area of the United Methodist Church

Rev. Elizabeth Hill, the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church

Rev. John Boley, the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church

Rev. Kathy Brown, The Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church

Rev. Jodie Flessner District Superintendent Northern Waters District, Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church

Rev. Margie Crawford, District Superintendent Mid-West District, the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church

Rabbi Josh Whinston, Temple Beth Emeth, Ann Arbor

Cantor Regina Lambert-Hayut, Temple Beth Emeth, Ann Arbor

Rabbi Daniel K. Alter, Temple Beth Emeth, Ann Arbor

St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Detroit

Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe

Trevor Bechtel, Pastor, Shalom Community Church, Ann Arbor

Saginaw African-American Pastors

Deacon James Rauner, Catholic Diocese of Kalamazoo and Pax Christi Michigan State Council

Robert Podzikowski, Pax Christi Michigan State Council Chair

Kimberly Redigan, Pax Christi Michigan State Council and Michigan Coalition for Human Rights Vice Chair

Marianne Bernard, Pax Christi Michigan State Council

Joan Tirak, Loaves and Fishes Ministries Co-Founder, Lansing

Brother Thomas Zerafa, OFM, Michigan Coalition for Human Rights Executive Board Committee

Rev. Robert Hundley, Pastor First United Methodist Church Grand Rapids

Rev. Jeffery Harrold, New Beginnings Community Church, Ann Arbor

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team

Rabbi Alana Alpert, Congregation T'chayah, Ferndale

Rev. Bill Wylie-Kellermann, United Methodist pastor, Michigan Conference

Rev. Denise Griebler, United Church of Christ pastor, Michigan Conference

Rev. Sharon Zimmerman Rader, Retired United Methodist Bishop

Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters

The Islamic Society of Greater Lansing

Rev. Anita Hahn, Pastor Midland First United Methodist Church

IHM Sisters Leadership Council

Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing

**Rev. Mark Christopher Lane, Pastor Central United Methodist Church,
Traverse City**

**Rev. Melanie Carey, Pastor Nardin Park United Methodist Church, Farmington
Hills**

IHM Sisters Healing Racism Committee

IHM Peace, Justice, and Sustainability Advisory Committee

Friends of Returning Citizens (FORC)

**Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) Region VII Michigan
Congregations**

Sr. Mary Ellen Howard, Sisters of Mercy

Sr. Barbara Beasley, IHM

Rev. Edwin Rowe, pastor emeritus, Central United Methodist Church, Detroit

Rev. Cass Charrette, Detroit

**Imam Mustapha Elturk, President, Islamic Organization of North America,
IONA**

Interfaith Justice Committee, Detroit People's Water Board Coalition

Sisters, Home Visitors of Mary

Sr. Rosemarie Abate, Detroit

Community Church of God, Ypsilanti

**Rev. William Haggard, Clergy Member of the Michigan Conference of the United
Methodist Church**

Rev. Donald Spachman, clergy member of the Michigan Area of the United Methodist Church.

Rev. Donnell T. Wyche, Senior Pastor, Vineyard Church of Ann Arbor; Advisor, Vineyard USA Justice Network

Rev. Joe Summers, Rector of the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Ann Arbor

Dwight L. Wilson, Chairman of the Interfaith Round Table of Washtenaw County

Mary S Grannan, Still Mountain Center for Buddhist Meditation

Jackie Miller, Still Mountain Buddhist Meditation Center

The Reverend Yolanda Whiten, M.Div.

Retired Pastor Jerry Hatter