



NEWS RELEASE

CALIFORNIA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

CA BISHOPS ISSUE STATEMENT ON PRISON HUNGER STRIKE AND ISOLATION POLICIES; *Bishops offer to serve on any oversight committee convened to investigate alleged human rights violations and propose corrective measures.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SACRAMENTO –The following joint statement was issued today on behalf California Conference of Catholic Bishops concerning the current prisoner hunger strike and state policies on prisoner isolation. Please attribute to the “California Conference of Catholic Bishops.”

“Today marks Day 52 of the California prisoner hunger strike. We, the California Conference of Catholic Bishops, once again extend our offer to Gov. Brown and Dr. Jeffrey Beard, Secretary of the Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), to assist in the resolution of this urgent life threatening situation. We offer to serve Gov. Brown and Dr. Beard on any outside oversight committee that may be convened to investigate any alleged human rights violations in the California’s prisons in order to propose the necessary corrective measures.

“As the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote in their pastoral letter, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (dated November 15, 2000), ‘We oppose the increasing use of isolation units, especially in the absence of due process and the monitoring and professional assessment of the effects of such confinement on the mental health of inmates.’ No one affected by crime is helped when a human being is subjected to this inhumane form of punishment. The California Catholic Bishops have voiced concerns and have been in dialogue with the CDCR for 12 years on the very issues being surfaced now.

“We stand opposed to any form of unjust, inhumane treatment. While it may be that isolation mitigates gang activity, placing humans in isolation in a Secure Housing Unit (SHU) has no restorative or rehabilitative purpose. It is not a sustainable solution to legitimate security concerns. Some of the men on this hunger strike have been in isolation for up to 35 years with very minimal human contact. International human rights standards consider more than 15 days in isolation to be torture.

“Our prayers and concern go out to the men involved in this hunger strike and their families. Our prayers and concern also go out to all who are affected by the criminal justice system: prison leadership, staff, correctional officers and administrators; as well as to crime victims and their families, who have endured the pain and suffering of criminal violence. We offer our assistance to state officials to resolve this terrible situation.”

(Eds: The California Catholic Conference is the public advocacy office of the Bishops of California. Representing the Archbishops of Los Angeles and San Francisco, and the Bishops of Fresno, Monterey, Oakland, Orange, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Jose, Santa Rosa and Stockton, it is the official voice of the 10 million Catholics and their many parishes, schools, universities, social service agencies in California.)

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