



April 28, 2023

Testimony in Support of Three Provisions in the Omnibus Public Safety Bill (S.F. 2909)

Dear Members of the Public Safety Omnibus Conference Committee:

The Minnesota Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota, writes to encourage you to include the following three provisions in the final omnibus bill (S.F. 2909; Second Unofficial Engrossment): the Clean Slate Act (Article 8, lines 139.24-145.29); the supplemental appropriation for the non-profit security grant program (Article 2, lines 8.4-9.2); and the background checks expansion for certain gun purchases (Article 14, lines 228.20-239.17). We believe that each provision promotes public safety.

Clean Slate Act

Pope Francis has said, “Where there is no mercy, there is no justice.” Catholics believe that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future. Therefore, the Catholic Church in Minnesota has consistently advocated for responses to crime that do not simply punish, but that also rehabilitate and restore. Offering a second chance to prior offenders serves the common good of all Minnesotans.

Offending individuals sometimes face significant collateral consequences once they leave jail or prison, especially in the areas of housing and employment. Expungements for certain offenses can help reintegrate them into the community and make it easier for them to rebuild their lives. Expunging certain convictions will also have the positive collateral effect of also rebuilding their family life, which promotes the well-being of any minor children that they may have.

The legislation promotes the right balance between reintegrating prior offenders and meeting the needs of employers and landlords by ensuring the safety of those in their care is not negatively impacted.

Gun Violence Prevention

The public has a responsibility to ensure that those who exercise the right to gun ownership can do so responsibly. Commonsense regulations to prevent the most egregious acts of gun violence, such as background checks on pistols and semiautomatic guns, come with little cost and might save hundreds of lives per year. According to a recent Fox News poll, conducted April 21-24, 87 percent of Americans favor such background checks.

We do think it is worth mentioning in this context that new regulations related to gun ownership should go hand-in-hand with a renewed commitment to enforcing laws related to illegal gun possession that are already on the books. Like background checks, stepping up enforcement of existing laws has

tremendous public support at 81 percent. Local government aid should be tied to accountability measures for municipalities to ensure enforcement of existing laws.

We also note that, though gun violence prevention laws are necessary, they are not sufficient. We must protect people with prudent laws while we also bind the wounds of hurting people to address the social and cultural factors that nurture gun violence, particularly fatherlessness and family fragmentation. There are no simple solutions, but for all the task forces and commissions this Legislature creates, there could be few more important than ones aimed at addressing the root causes of violence—cultural, social, and economic.

Nonprofit security grants

Gun regulations must also be coupled with increased security measures, especially in schools and for vulnerable members of the community. For example, we know from statistics that Minnesota now ranks ninth in the country for the number of antisemitic incidents, which is deeply concerning. In fact, antisemitic incidents tripled in Minnesota from 2021 to 2022, and at least sixty percent of anti-religious incidents around the country target the Jewish community. We stand with our brothers and sisters in the Jewish community urging an increased allocation for the nonprofit security grant program.

Bigotry knows no boundaries and is not relegated to any one side of the political spectrum. And it appears to be growing against people of faith. Less well known than some of the incidents occurring at synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship, are the 252 incidents of arson, vandalism, or destruction that have occurred in Catholic churches since May 2020.¹ This is an enormous increase in just the past few years.

One might argue that nonprofits, churches, and other groups should be using their own resources for these expenditures. In fact, they already do. But what this grant reflects is the state's commitment to protecting vulnerable people, especially when they are praying and worshipping. As an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, the grant program is also an important means of protecting people and saving lives in spaces that have a higher likelihood of being targeted for mass violence and destruction.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to all Minnesotans.

Respectfully yours,



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¹ <https://www.usccb.org/committees/religious-liberty/Backgrounder-Attacks-on-Catholic-Churches-in-US>