

Proposition 47 The Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act General Election, November 4, 2014

On Tuesday, November 4, 2014, California voters will be faced with several key ballot initiatives. Many of these, including *Proposition 47, the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act*, will have wide reaching impact both fiscally as well as socially. California Bishops do not take positions on many issues but the social impact of Prop 47 compelled the Bishops **to take a stand in favor** of this particular ballot initiative.

What is Prop. 47?

Prop. 47 re-examines how the state deals with the reclassification of low-level offenders. It would reclassify certain nonviolent crimes as misdemeanors which would reduce the penalties and reduce the prison population overall. Specific categories that would be reclassified under the proposal are:

1. check fraud
2. drug possession
3. forgery
4. petty theft
5. petty theft with prior theft-related convictions
6. receiving stolen property
7. Shoplifting

People previously convicted of these reclassified crimes would be resentenced.

Why did California Bishops take this position in support of Prop. 47?

According to the US Catholic Conference of Bishops, the national prison population increased from 200,000 inmates in 1972 to over 2 million in 2000 with over 200,000 of the inmate population consisting of people with mental illness – over 10 percent of the incarcerated population. This represents a 10 percent increase in just 18 years.

The prison system in California and the nation is broken and does not address the root cause of serious crime. Programs need to offer offenders life skills, religious expression and recovery from substance abuse in order for them to reintegrate into the general population as productive and contributing members of our society.

How are crime victims impacted by the changes mandated by Prop. 47?

Victims need to know that they are not alone and that the resources of the Church and the greater community are there for them.

Prop. 47 requires that state savings resulted by the measure be placed into a special fund. A portion of these savings would be used for trauma recovery centers and services for victims of crime. (See below for a breakdown of programs supported.)

How will Prop.47 make our neighborhoods safer and our schools better?

Prisons do not make good schools, mental health programs or healthy communities. The overcrowded state prison system has drained taxpayer dollars and law enforcement for non-serious and low-level offenses.

Prop. 47 would continue California's trend of moving away from state corrections for nonviolent crimes and investing these funds in local public safety solutions. Over \$750 million alone would be redirected into K-12 school programs over the next few years. By doing so, it could represent a significant step toward improving public safety, student educational outcomes and community health.

How are offenders and their families impacted by Prop. 47?

All human life is sacred and all social policy needs to emanate with respect for life and the dignity of the human person. Those who have broken society's trust are not lost. While they are paying a price for their actions, they need to be given every opportunity to become contributing members of society.

Prop. 47 enables offenders to become contributing members of society and their families in two ways: First: It outlines provisions for familial visitation which, according to several studies, has been shown to reduce recidivism. Second: Individuals with felony convictions face a difficult time obtaining employment, housing and social services. Reclassification of the seven crimes listed above from felony to misdemeanor will reduce the stigma and legal

restrictions that make it difficult for an offender to fully integrate back into the community.

Who supports this and why?

Prop. 47 is supported by law enforcement leaders George Gascon, District Attorney for the City and County of SF, William Lansdowne, Former Chief of Policy of San Diego, San Jose and Richmond, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice and others. They state that this initiative is pragmatic in that it allows the justice system to focus valuable resources on serious offenders and stops wasting taxpayer dollars on offenders that pose no real threat to society. It dedicates the savings to restorative activities, assistance for victims of crime and mental health and drug treatment programs that are not available under current sentencing guidelines.

Who opposes and why?

Opponents consist primarily of law enforcement professionals and their unions as well as crime victim groups who feel that the proposition does not allow enough input from victims and prosecutors and that it would release serious offenders into the general population.

What are the fiscal impacts to the State of California?

It currently costs taxpayers approximately \$60,000 to house offenders, the vast majority incarcerated for nonviolent infractions that are listed above. While there will be an initial cost in resentencing offenders, the savings to the State of California without prolonged incarceration will be significant. If Prop. 47 passes, it could save \$150 - \$200 million per year (with \$1.2 billion saved over five years.)

How would the savings be used?

According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, the millions of dollars of savings that result in not incarcerating offenders for minor crimes and misdemeanors would be spent to support dropout preventions, victim services, mental health and drug abuse treatment (65 percent of savings), trauma recovery and services to victims of crime (10 percent) and programs designed to improve K-12 education and truancy reduction programs (25 percent)

How is this position of the California Bishops consistent with Church Doctrine and scripture?

The dignity of the human person is central in Catholic teaching. The US Bishops' statement entitled [*Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration*](#) emphasizes that punishment must have a clear purpose, protect society and

rehabilitate those who violate the law. The current system does not address these needs and in most cases, creates a vicious cycle of repeat offenders. It also does very little to assist the most vulnerable in our society, the poor and disenfranchised, especially those with mental health issues.

This past June, Pope Francis called upon the legal community to examine and address the causes of crime -- which are rooted in economic and social inequality. He further emphasized that the increase in harsh sentencing does nothing to address the underlying issues. The Pope called on society to "do everything possible to correct, improve and educate the person (the perpetrator) so that he is able to mature in respect, so he is not discouraged and faces the damage caused, rethinking his life without being crushed by the weight of his miseries." He further stated that "the great challenge that we must all face, is to help incarcerated people to rehabilitate, to re-embark upon the path of good, to be authentic people who move on from their miseries to become merciful themselves."

In the scriptures (John 8) Jesus rejected punishment for its own sake, stating that we are all sinners and was hopeful that offenders would transform their lives and turn to be embraced by God's love.

Where can I find good, objective information and further analysis on Prop. 47?

The California Budget Project offers unbiased, non-political in depth analysis of the proposition and details its fiscal impact to the state as well as the impact on public safety, community health and California's criminal justice system. The full report can be found [here](#).

The original ballot initiative can be found on the [website of the California Secretary of State](#) (<http://www.sos.ca.gov/>), along with all the ballot measures on the November 2014 Ballot. The official statement of the Bishops of California on Prop 47 and an analysis of all the propositions – along with relevant information from Catholic social teaching – is available on the California Catholic Conferences Election page. (www.cacatholic.org)

What can I do if I want to support of Proposition 47?

You can learn more and register your support on the official campaign website at www.safetyandschools.com. Sign up for updates and other communications from the California Catholic Conference and California Bishops at www.cacatholic.org.