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June 11, 2020

The Honorable J.B. Pritzker
Governor of the State of Illinois
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Office of the Governor
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph, 16-100
Chicago, IL 60601

Re: HB 4295

Dear Governor Pritzker,

We write this letter in support of HB 4295, which is now pending in the Illinois General Assembly. The past weeks have brought into sharp focus the racial injustices that plague our country and state. To move forward, our communities are in need of healing, reconciliation, and justice that brings us together instead of dividing us. HB 4295 is landmark legislation that will foster the growth of restorative justice in our communities—particularly those communities of color most impacted by racism. We urge its inclusion in any legislation that the General Assembly and you may be considering as part of a broader package to address the evils of racial prejudice that afflict our society as a whole and our criminal justice system in particular.

The Catholic Lawyers Guild of Chicago, on whose behalf we write, is a bar association composed of hundreds of Catholic lawyers in the greater Chicago area. At the suggestion of Cardinal Blase Cupich, in 2015, we became involved in an effort to foster the utilization of restorative justice practices in our schools, communities and courts with a particular focus on communities of color where restorative justice practices might have the greatest impact. We have worked closely with Father David Kelly of the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation in the Back of the Yards neighborhood of Chicago and with judges on the Circuit Court of Cook County as it established Restorative Justice Community Courts in Cook County. We also worked with the Precious Blood Ministry and the Big Shoulders Fund to introduce restorative justice practices as part of a pilot program in several inner-city parochial schools – Leo High School, St. Sabina Academy and Visitation School – with the hope that these programs might reduce violence in our schools and ultimately extend to other public and parochial schools in the area.

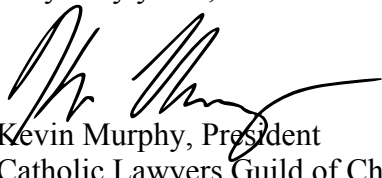
As our involvement in this project deepened, we learned that one of the major impediments to full participation in the dialogue encouraged by restorative justice practices is the fear on the part of participants that information disclosed in open and honest dialogue in a restorative justice circle might later be used against a participant in court. We then embarked upon a careful study of what steps could be taken to protect the confidentiality of statements of participants in restorative justice practices while at the same time respecting the legitimate interest of society in law enforcement. We have drafted appropriate legislation to achieve that end in coordination with several members of the General Assembly which is now pending as HB 4295.

We enclose a fact sheet that lays out in summary fashion the provisions of this proposed legislation. We also enclose a copy of HB 4295 which is presently pending in the Illinois House of Representatives. We know that you and Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton have repeatedly expressed your support for greater use of restorative justice practices. In fact, we were greatly encouraged to learn that the Lieutenant Governor herself has been trained in conducting restorative justice circles. She serves as an example for all of us. Against this background, you have demonstrated that you fully understand the benefits that the use of restorative justice practices in our schools, communities and criminal and juvenile courts can have, particularly to the citizens of our state who suffer from the evils of racial prejudice and injustice.

We hope that in your continuing conversations with members of the Illinois General Assembly – and in particular, with members of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus, who we understand are undertaking the drafting of a broader legislative package – you and they will consider the inclusion of the provisions of HB 4295 in that comprehensive legislative program to address racial injustice in our society.

We would be pleased to discuss with you and/or your staff any aspects of our proposed legislation and any contributions we can make to the overall effort to address racial injustices. We thank you and your administration for all of the efforts you are making to cleanse our state of this evil.

Very truly yours,



Kevin Murphy, President
Catholic Lawyers Guild of Chicago

Cc: The Honorable Juliana Stratton
Lieutenant Governor of Illinois
214 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

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100 W. Randolph St., Ste. 15-200
Chicago, IL 60601

Enclosures: HB 4295 and related Fact Sheet