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Committee Testimony for House Bill 1231
Judiciary Committee
2:30 pm March 10, 2025

Madam Chair and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.
Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Sister Kathleen Atkinson. I'm the director of *Ministry on the Margins*, an ecumenical, volunteer-based program serving over 1600 people a week. I have been involved in Prison Ministry for 14 years and in that time, I have learned so very much about Individuals, Corrections, Rehabilitation, Re-entry, and in specific to this legislation – people accused of Sex-related Crimes, their victims, and families. **That is why I speak in support of House Bill 1231.**

In the words of an 18-year-old young man who was in prison, "Sister, my grandparents were married at the age of my girlfriend and I, but I am in prison. What changed?"
"Chris," I responded, "the law."

He and his girlfriend eventually did marry. Have a family. Are limited to where they can live, work, worship, recreate because he is a registered sex offender. He has successfully completed his time of incarceration, his required treatment, and has had no violations of any sort. He is low risk – but he *and his family* are still caught in a tightly woven net of legal restrictions and social stigma because he is still publicly listed as a registered sex offender.

The law is a living document and unintended consequences, when they are brought to light, can be considered. The law has changed and will continue to change. This is what is being requested today. Focusing on the original role of the registry to protect the community from sexual predators, this legislation allows a man or woman to petition the court for removal from public registration based on the determination that a person is not a threat to the community. ***Actually, especially in the case of a low-risk offender, often the best interest of society is reintegration of a man or woman (and their family) into employment, housing, community life.*** This would be true for Oscar – a low-risk sex offender living apart from his wife and children since 2011 so they can have a home. Or Kenneth – who lost his job after 10 months because the national office has a no sex felon policy. Or the church who has a responsible safety for children policy on no registered felons in their faith formation program but a family preparing for the sacraments and a dad who is still on the registry for another decade. Or the many people who slept on the floor of Ministry on the Margins last night; not allowed into housing or even the homeless shelters because they are on the sex offender registry.

I ask your support of House Bill 1231. This bill is intentionally narrow in its focus and application. It allows an individual and a judge to determine that for a low-risk sex offender the sentenced incarceration, rehabilitation, and treatment really can be successful. That a low-risk sex offender really can become free to pursue housing, employment, and family life. That an action as an 18- or 20-year-old does not automatically condemn someone to a lifetime (or even a couple decades) of punishment. That society can be protected by focusing on real threats as is often raised in testimony and public concern.