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Committee Testimony for House Bill 1393
Judiciary Committee
9 am February 2, 2021

Mister Chairman and Members of the Judiciary Committee.
Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Sister Kathleen Atkinson. I serve as the director of *Ministry on the Margins*, an ecumenical, volunteer-based program serving over 1000 people a week. Along with a food pantry, street outreach, and emergency sheltering; we're involved with spiritual groups in the men's penitentiary, women's penitentiary and Missouri River Correctional Center, the *Free Through Recovery* Program, a Families of the Incarcerated Support Group, the DOCR Children of the Incarcerated Initiative, and two Prison2Society transition groups I've been blessed to do this work full time for 8 years.

In October 2018, I was invited to participate with 20 others from around the nation in a pilot certification program in Restorative Justice at Loyola University, Chicago.

We spent days in seminars by psychologists, theologians, community leaders law enforcement, prosecuting and defense attorneys, etc. etc. etc.

More profoundly,

We spent a day at Cook County Jail with Sheriff Tom Dart, staff and inmates listening to how participation in Restorative Justice **was seeking to change the mission of the system from punishment to healing and convert the procedure from adversarial to collaborative.**

We spent a day in US District Court with the Honorable Nan Nolan and defendants participating in Restorative Justice "Sentencing Circles." **They spoke about crime as a violation of people and relationships rather than breaking a law. They focused on putting things right (restoration) rather than blame and punishment.**

Even more profoundly,

We spent an afternoon with a family who had lost a loved one in a brutal drug-induced murder by their neighbor; a boy who had grown up with their boy. A family whose close friendship they didn't want to lose in the midst of the devastating loss of both their sons – One to murder. One to prison.

All of these people were participating in Restorative Justice as part of their criminal justice system and this is what House Bill 1393 asks you to do – to give those involved in the sentencing of an individual **one more tool to incorporate into the corrections and rehabilitation process:**

A tool that seeks to bring people back into relationship with one another and with the broader community; a tool that seeks to bring healing to the victim by including him or her in the sentencing process, not arbitrarily but face to face and eye to eye.

Restorative Justice is a process that is familiar in our state Juvenile System and to those of us who follow Dr Bill:

Step 8

Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them

Step 9

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Restorative Justice absolutely *doesn't* work for every person, every community, or in every situation; *it is* about relationships and relationships are messy in the best of times. **It is about changing lives rather than doing time** and that's hard work.

But it's worth it and I ask you to support House Bill 1393 with Restorative Justice as an addition to the sentencing alternatives available. Because people are worth it.