

House Criminal Justice Committee  
Proponent Testimony  
House Bill 183 (Pick one)  
Written Testimony Only

Stephen Hills  
Nov. 15, 2021

For the House: Dear Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

My name is Stephen Hills and I am a resident of Franklin County. Please find my witness information form attached. Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on House Bill 183.

One hundred and forty Ohioans are on death row – thirteen have spent at least 32 years there. That is unacceptable. Attorney General Dave Yost has said that the death penalty system is “broken... it demeans all law and breeds disrespect for law.” The death penalty needs to be fixed or abolished. For many reasons, it is difficult to fix, therefore it should be abolished now.

The death penalty assumes a person cannot change, but people do. I knew a man, Richard Crabbe, who did not receive the death penalty even though, when young, he killed another person. Richard’s sentence gave him the opportunity to turn his life around and he did. He earned a college degree from Ohio Christian University after his imprisonment and finished his life just shy of a master’s degree. When he died of natural causes in 2014, he was survived by his wife, a son, a daughter and three granddaughters.

I met Richard when he was doing volunteer work with young men incarcerated in the Circleville Correctional Institution. His friendship and example inspired me (and many others) to become involved in prison ministry. For many years, Richard was active in Kairos of Ohio’s Prison Ministry program and was a leader for Kairos’s one-on-one mentoring of incarcerated young men at Circleville. His life story had a powerful impact on virtually all the young men he encountered. I’m glad to have known Richard. None of what I’ve reported here could have happened had he been executed. Richard set a hopeful example for all incarcerated young men with uncertain futures.

I believe that the death penalty is morally wrong. Before I was involved in prison ministry, I did not have strong feelings for or against the death penalty. As a life-long Presbyterian, I knew about my church’s stance in opposing the death penalty. But it was not until I encountered the real-life stories of people confronting our justice system that I understood the human side of it all. We humans are imperfect and our institutions are imperfect. “Since 1973, more than 185 people [in the U.S.] have been released from death row with evidence of their innocence.” (Death Penalty Information Center, Washington, D.C.) All of us do things we regret and often need opportunities to change. The death penalty gives no chance for redemption. Restorative justice should be the aim of the criminal justice system, not revenge. I therefore ask you to support House Bill 183 to end the death penalty. More Ohioans need a second chance.