



Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Rankling Member LeLand, and Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, my name is Alana Jochum, I use she/her pronouns, and I am the Executive Director of Equality Ohio.

Equality Ohio is firmly committed to lived and legal equality for all Ohioans. We know it is our responsibility to advocate for the vulnerable, and that includes victims of a biased, harmful sentencing practice. Our organization understands the importance of reforming our criminal justice system, and particularly, to mitigating the most harmful outcomes from unjust government policies on BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Disabled, and other underrepresented communities.

As a matter of principle, our government should not be sentencing people to death, but is even less justified in doing so when we are aware of such high rates of error and bias, its arbitrary usage, and evidence has *not* shown that the death penalty provides any real deterrent value.

**More than 70% of people on Ohio's death row are there for a murder of a white person, even though more than half of all homicide victims are black. And of the 138 inmates on Ohio's death row, more than half are people of color even though people of color only make up 16% of Ohio's population.**

As an organization that centers a racial equity lens in all of our work, the death penalty stands out as a reminder that our justice system still sentences people of color more severely and at higher rates than their white counterparts. This disproportional pattern of sentencing tells us that people are not being equally sentenced for their crimes, but instead, their sentences are guided by subconscious racial bias. Black men accused of killing white women, for instance, are [more likely to be sentenced to death in Ohio](#).

The variability of the application of the death penalty further illustrates its arbitrary harmfulness. Access to adequate defense counsel, the county where the crime was committed, and the county prosecutor's and judge's personal views on the death penalty are the biggest factors in determining whether or not someone receives a death sentence. Just five counties in Ohio—Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, and Summit—are responsible for 68% of Ohio death cases.

Not only is it cruel and expensive, but when the government gets it wrong, the harm cannot be undone, and the result is a [wrongful killing](#) by our own government. In other words, the cost of such a mistake by our government—a mistake our government has a



track record of making—is the defendant’s life. The death penalty simply has zero margin for error.

Lastly, there is simply no evidence that having a death penalty in place deters violent crime. Indeed, the FBI Uniform Crime Report has repeatedly showed that the South, which accounts for over 80% of executions, has the highest murder rate. And for such an expensive process, the end result does not actually support the people who matter the most: the families of those who are harmed. In fact, the death penalty often draws out the grieving and healing process for decades when families simply want a sense of closure and peace. Rather than providing families with grief counseling, financial assistance, and ongoing support, the death penalty only provides more death.

Equality Ohio believes that a fair criminal justice system is one that equitably applies the law and supports families rather than causing more grief and pain. We do not believe the death penalty is representative of a fair justice system, nor does it attempt to repair or give families peace after the harm perpetrated against them. Nothing can ever truly repair the harm against the victim and their families, but the death penalty is not a part of the solution. Abolishing the death penalty and replacing it with life in prison is supported by 60% of Ohioans, and truly is the right thing to do.

We urge you to end this inhumane practice and vote yes on HB183.