

House Criminal Justice Committee
Proponent Testimony: HB183
Written Testimony Only

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

Greetings from Bluffton, Ohio in Allen County. Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on HB 183. My name is Elizabeth Hostetler. I am a resident of Bluffton and an active member of my community, as well as the broader area of Lima/Allen County, state, nation and international communities. As a retired teacher, principal and college professor I continue to advocate for all aspects of education, including an informed and involved citizenry. Presently I enjoy serving on three area boards: the public library, a child development center and a voter rights organization. I'm the founder of The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center at Bluffton University, celebrating its 35th year of serving schools, churches, universities and community groups across Ohio promoting peace, justice, reconciliation, dignity and respect for life.

Today I'm writing as a citizen who cares about, and is not afraid of, equal justice, fairness, respect and dignity for all human life...no holds barred...and regardless of ANYTHING, including those who have committed violent crimes. For me it comes down to the following:

Killing is wrong, whether committed by citizens or by the State. I find it worse that the State, the very body that creates laws that say killing is wrong, has legislated actions that permit killing at the hands of the State. According to Alan Johnson, retired Columbus Dispatch journalist covering the prison beat, including 21 executions, the Death Certificates of executed persons states that the CAUSE OF DEATH IS HOMOCIDE. We name it capital punishment and the death penalty but isn't it still murder, the taking of a life? Semantics can't cover what it is.

My concern is not WHO is on Death Row but that ANYONE is on Death Row. The use of the Death Penalty is a moral, social and spiritual issue for me. I believe that life is sacred and should not be taken by citizens, courts/juries, legislators, or State appointed executioners. Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, said, "There is absolutely nothing beneficial or redemptive about the Death Penalty." I'm certain you all agree that nurturing a respect for life is essential to developing and maintaining a healthy society. What are we saying about respect for life by having State sponsored killing, an action that has no beneficial or redemptive value to society? The State MUST be a positive player in the nurturing of a healthy society and thus the Death Penalty MUST be repealed.

Regardless of the facts, there are **long held myths** that:

- ✓ Justice is blind regarding race, gender, religion, geography and socio-economics...we only need to look at the Death Penalty and general incarcerated population stats. Representative Jean Schmidt and former supporter of the Death Penalty but now co-sponsoring HB 183 said, "There are forced confessions leading to innocent people on Death Row and there is unequal application of the Death Penalty."

- ✓ The Death Penalty has been a deterrent to violent crime and made society safer...we only need to read our newspapers to realize that is a myth, the Death Penalty has not reduced crime or made us safer; Using the Death Penalty has demonstrated financially prudent use of tax dollars...it costs far more to keep a person on Death Row than to sentence the person to life without parole. Present estimates are that it costs \$16 million per Death Row inmate from entry to execution or natural death. Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr, president of the Ohio Council of Churches and brother to a murder victim said, "Invest more in restoration than revenge." What if we invested those dollars in addressing the tragedies lived out in violent crime victim families? What about assistance with victim burial costs? Counseling for loved ones on both sides of a crime? How about developing preventive measures addressing violence: education, training, access to mental and physical health services to name a few?
- ✓ Executions are painless, quick and efficient...ask the family of Dennis McGuire whose botched execution was 13 minutes of torture. Alan Johnson was present for that execution of horror and it led him to look at all of the people involved, leading up to and participating in executions and the impact on those as well as the families. He researched the Death Penalty for his seminary PhD, resulting in a dissertation titled "From Capital Punishment to Forgiveness." He concluded that, "There is no closure with the Death Penalty so forgiveness is an important and critical part of Christian thinking because it helps with providing some closure." Demetrius Minor of the group Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty, said "I was a strong pro-life advocate but supported the Death Penalty. Then I realized how hypocritical I was with my thinking. I saw my inconsistencies/contradictions in my beliefs about pro-life. I turned my thinking around and said, 'pro-life is womb to tomb' and vengeance is not mine, but the Lord's."
- ✓ Everyone on Death Row is guilty...for every 5 persons on Death Row, 1 person is innocent. We don't have an error free judicial or law enforcement system. People are indeed found guilty and sentenced to prison when they are later exonerated. The Innocents Project in Ohio and throughout the country have led to the release of many death row inmates. Do we really want to continue with a process in which we can only say, "Oooops!" when an innocent person is murdered by the State? Alan Johnson said, "These are people! Broken, but people!"
- ✓ Death Penalty execution brings closure to loved ones... listen to the words of retired Ohio prison warden George Alexander, "Executions don't bring closure but rather create new victims. Only a small number of victims' families even support the Death Penalty." Jennifer Pryor of Ohioans To Stop Executions, adds, "Trauma begets trauma. "No one escapes the horrors of executions: families on both sides of the crime; those providing religious counsel to an inmate; Death Row guards and others involved with the system. Few families find consolation or peace after an execution. Expecting a sense of resolution, they find, instead, that the same pain of loss follows them home...another murder did not reduce their pain or fill their losses.

We need to ask ourselves some important questions: Why is our legislation for the right to life applied to the unborn child and not all humans? What does this say to our children about murder outside the womb? I wonder how many children have grown up assuming, as I did as a child, that murder is an acceptable way of resolving a problem, if the murder is done by the State, because "they" know what's

right. Is there a better position for the State to take that demonstrates to all, womb to tomb, that all murder is wrong and the State will no longer permit executions?

Doing the right thing is HARD but when we do our homework, put aside the myths, and consider life as a right, not a privilege, we can correct past thinking by looking to the future. The Death Penalty is wrong. One hope I have, as a result of this testimony, is that you will recognize the wrongs of past decisions legislating the option of murder by the State. My second hope is that you will each commit to restoring respect and protection for all human life, victim or victimizer, unborn or grown up, by REPEALING THE DEATH PENALTY. It is time to do the right thing.

Please vote yes on the Death Penalty Repeal Bill HB 183. Thank you.

Dr. Elizabeth A. Hostetler