



Testimony Before the House Finance Committee

Wednesday, October 11, 10:00 a.m.

House Bill 259 – Abolish the death penalty; revise number of juror challenges

Proponent testimony of Cynthia Brown, Founder and CEO, Heartbeat Movement Inc.

Chairman Edwards, Ranking Member Sweeney, and esteemed members of the House Finance Committee,

I stand before you today as the founder and CEO of Heartbeat Movement Inc. But more importantly, I stand before you as a voice for the voiceless—those wrongly convicted and facing the most irreversible punishment: death.

In our pursuit of justice, we must acknowledge an uncomfortable truth: our judicial system, while robust, is fallible. Mistakes

happen. The innocent get wrongly convicted. In most cases, these errors can be rectified, but with the death penalty, the margin for error is non-existent. Once a life is taken, it cannot be returned.

Since 1981, 11 individuals in Ohio's justice system have been exonerated from death row after evidence emerged proving their innocence. Each one of those numbers represents a human being, a life nearly extinguished due to procedural oversights, mistaken identities, or, sadly, prejudices. If Ohio continues with the death penalty, we risk adding to this grim tally.

Heartbeat Movement has worked with individuals who've been affected by the criminal justice system. Some of these individuals have faced decades behind bars for crimes they did not commit. They are the living testament to the imperfections within our system.

While the financial aspects of the death penalty might be a focus for this committee, I implore you to look beyond the numbers. Consider the human cost, the potential loss of innocent life. Can we, in good conscience, allow for the risk of possible execution of even one innocent individual?

Furthermore, the prolonged appeals process, mandatory in death penalty cases to ensure thoroughness, not only drains our state's resources but also prolongs the anguish of victims' families, forcing them to relive their trauma repeatedly.

I urge you, esteemed committee members, to think deeply about the real implications of the death penalty. House Bill 259 offers Ohio the chance to err on the side of caution, to stand against the irreparable mistake of executing the innocent.

Let us choose a path that upholds the sanctity of life, especially when doubt exists. Let's end the death penalty in Ohio and be a beacon for justice, fairness, and humanity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Brown
Founder and CEO, Heartbeat Movement Inc.