

Dear Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Cantor Michael Zoosman and I am a resident of College Park, MD. Thank you for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on Ohio Senate Bill 101. I am an ordained member of the Jewish clergy, a former Jewish prison chaplain, a third generation Holocaust survivor, and the co-founder of L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty. I write this message on behalf of our 2917 members worldwide, many in Ohio.

The thousands of members of the group [“L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty”](#) firmly believe that Judaism in the 21st century must unconditionally reject the death penalty.

Let there be no doubt: traditional Jewish law does indeed allow for capital punishment, albeit with prodigious safeguards. Rabbi Danny Schiff adroitly outlines the rabbinic arguments that reflect this reality in his excellent opinion piece for the Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle entitled [“Judaism does not reject the death penalty.”](#) As an ordained cantor and a former Jewish prison chaplain, however, I firmly agree with Pittsburgh's Jacobo Bielak in his response to Rabbi Schiff entitled [“Jewish law prohibits imposition of the death penalty if it does not deter.”](#) Just as there is no doubt that traditional Jewish law allows for the death penalty, there is also no doubt that [meta-studies](#) have concluded that when it comes to deterrence, there is no demonstrable link between the presence or absence of the death penalty and murder rates. For this reason alone, most traditional Jewish arguments for the death penalty no longer apply in our world.

But there is more that the Jewish world must consider in the wake of the Holocaust and the events of the 20th century...

Many of the members of “L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty,” including this author, are direct descendants of Holocaust victims and survivors. We know more than most that capital punishment is not the same as the Shoah. And yet, for many L'chaim! members, the [shadow of the Holocaust](#) is inextricably linked to our firm rejection of the death penalty in all cases, even that of the [Tree of Life shooter](#). (Indeed, the very logo for L'chaim! carries at its core the Eitz Chaim – the Tree of Life.) The form of execution that Ohio uses is lethal injection, which is itself a direct [Nazi legacy](#), first implemented on Earth by the Third Reich as part of their infamous Aktion T4 protocol used to kill people deemed “unworthy of life.” That program was devised by Dr. Karl Brandt, the personal physician of Adolf Hitler. If this were not enough, across the USA, more and more states are erecting [gas chambers](#), including one in Arizona that uses [Zyklon B](#), the same lethal gas used in Auschwitz. No Jewish argument about the death penalty in the 21st century should ignore these facts, against which the members of L'chaim! firmly chant “NEVER AGAIN to state-sponsored murder!” For these reasons, L'chaim! members view the death penalty as one of the worst kinds of institutionalized evil that stains the United States, Israel or any nation that employs it.

Regarding Israel's 1962 execution of Nazi perpetrator Adolf Eichmann, Rabbi Schiff is indeed entirely correct that the rabbis did not object. Many other Jewish leaders did, however, vociferously protest. These included renowned Hebrew university philosophers Samuel Hugo Bergmann and Nathan Rotenstreich, scholar of Kabbalah Gershom Scholem, and Jewish theologian and philosopher Martin Buber, who called the execution a great [“mistake.”](#) Other Holocaust survivors themselves, such as Nobel-prize winning author, [Nelly Sachs](#) voiced their strident opposition to Eichmann's execution.

More than anyone, it was twentieth-century Jewish human rights icon Elie Wiesel whose words encapsulated the stand of the members of L'chaim! When asked about his feelings on capital punishment, Wiesel resolutely stated "[Death is not the answer.](#)" On this, Wiesel made [no exception](#), famously stating the following: "With every cell of my being and with every fiber of my memory I oppose the death penalty in all forms. I do not believe any civilized society should be at the service of death. I don't think it's human to become an agent of the angel of death."

Driven by Wiesel's prophetic call, L'chaim members – together with their partners at [Death Penalty Action](#) – ensure there is a vocal Jewish presence at every execution vigil in the [USA](#). We also are pen pals with all Americans in line for state-murder, letting them know that L'chaim! joins all of civilized humanity in standing with them on the side of life. L'chaim! also makes daily calls to all actively executing governors, signs daily petitions, drafts [op-eds](#), delivers synagogue programs, engages in regular TV, radio and podcast interviews, and advocates vociferously against the increasing calls for executions in [Israel](#).

In the wake of the Holocaust and the unparalleled horrors of the twentieth century, seventy percent of the nations of the world have recognized the inviolability of the human right of life and have abolished the death penalty. 21st-century Judaism, directly targeted by that unparalleled conflagration, must reflect this evolution and become a Tree of Life whose branches extend as a model across our world. We MUST abolish the death penalty - in Ohio, and across the world. We shall not rest until we do... I ask you to consider out testimony and vote yes on this critically important bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.