



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

My name is Tom Roberts. I have had the honor of serving our great state, representing the Miami Valley in both the Ohio House and Senate for over 20 years. I have continued my public service as the current president of the Ohio Conference of the NAACP.

The Ohio Conference of the NAACP and its affiliate chapters throughout the state stand in unwavering solidarity with the efforts of the No Death Penalty Ohio campaign to finally rid our state of this relic of our racist past. The racial disparities demonstrated throughout the death penalty prove that it does not and can not fulfill “equal justice under law.” In fact, a Gallup poll was released just last week that showed over half of Americans say the death penalty is applied unfairly.

In 1970 and 2001, the national NAACP approved resolutions in support of the abolition of the death penalty, and in 2009 the NAACP launched a campaign to reverse the trends of Black Americans on Death Row.

Sadly, racial bias is still prevalent in the legal system and shows that Black Ohioans are disproportionately given death sentences, especially when the victim is white. A 2020 study published in the *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* found that Black defendants with white victims in Hamilton County were 3.79-5.33 times more likely to receive a death sentence. Black people make up a majority on death row despite comprising 14% of the state’s population. These discrepancies further erode confidence in a system that purports to view all people equally under the law.

The majority of the men exonerated from death row are Black; of Ohio’s 11 death row exonerees, 8 are Black. In fact, we have come perilously close to executing an innocent Black man. Derrick Jamison, who spent 20 years on death row for a crime he didn’t commit, came within 90 minutes of an execution. He ordered his last meal and made arrangements for his body. It is worth noting that Jamison was convicted in Hamilton County. If not for strong outside advocacy for Jamison, he may well have been wrongfully

executed— our system is not designed to examine innocence claims, but rather that procedure was followed.

Though our society thinks we have sanitized our execution process by way of lethal injection, the racial injustice present in Ohio's death penalty is pervasive.

This committee has a historic opportunity to correct this horrific injustice. With tremendous bipartisan support backing Senate Bill 101, it is my hope that the committee will seize this opportunity and rid Ohio of this relic of its racist past. Abolishing the death penalty is one of the top priorities for the Ohio State Conference of the NAACP for this reason and we call on the Ohio legislature to end it immediately.