

Chairman Manning and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

For many years, I sat in the audience at legislative hearings such as this one working as a newspaper reporter. Now that I'm retired, I feel free for the first time to publicly express my opposition to capital punishment and support for Senate Bill 101.

As a journalist, I personally witnessed 21 men executed, with only a pane of glass and distance of 20 feet separating me from the death chamber. I saw men die who were afraid, angry, remorseful and bitter. The common denominator in each case was a death certificate read HOMICIDE as the cause of death. State-sanctioned, legal murder.

Over 18 years, I talked to inmates on Death Row. I talked to victim families. I talked to prosecutors and defense attorneys. I interviewed scores of death penalty supporters and opponents.

At the end of the day, I see no need or justification for Ohio to continue the death penalty. It does not heal the horrible wounds caused by murder, does not bring closure, and costs Ohio taxpayers more to pursue an execution than to keep someone locked up for life in prison.

More critically, I repeatedly saw racial and geographic inequities in how the death penalty was used across the state. The criminal justice system makes mistakes.

I wrote about two Columbus men, Timothy Howard and Gary James, who were convicted for murder and sentenced to death, only to be exonerated and released but after 27 years!

For all these reasons, anchored in my belief as a Christian that it is wrong to kill another human being, I humbly implore members of this committee to pass Senate Bill 101.

Thank you for reading and considering my testimony.

Alan Johnson