

Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Bill 101
Written Testimony Only
The Reverend Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr.
November 15, 2023

Dear Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is the Reverend Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr., and I am a resident of Canal Winchester. Thank you for providing me an opportunity to submit proponent testimony on Ohio Senate Bill 101.

As an advocate for the demise of the death penalty, I acknowledge that the public has every right to be outraged over violent, horrific acts that disrupt and destroy the lives of our fellow citizens, our neighbors, public servants, and more.

To be very specific, that “more” includes family members of murdered persons, often referred to as co-victims, an unwanted label that I myself have been forced to wear after the vicious murder of my then-21-year-old sister Jennifer in her Cleveland home. We are justified in harboring and projecting feelings of rage and anger over the murder of our loved ones.

Of course, our sentiments are legitimate reactions to the calculated, unethical, and immoral decision-making that drove other human beings to engage in repulsive, homicidal acts that abruptly or gradually ended the lives of other human beings and forever altered the direction of our families and communities.

As we Ohioans acknowledge our frustration over acts of murder, the urgent questions before us are: How do we respond to violent, murderous crimes? What is our response to rightfully convicted people who have angered us and hurt us the most?

While I am a co-victim, I am also a man of Christian faith who represents thousands of hope-infused Christians who participate in the Ohio Council of Churches. Through my intersecting identities, I am compelled to advance the belief that whether a life-ending act is carried out on a Cleveland street or in a Chillicothe prison as authorized by the state, killing is wrong. To be sure, homicide to show that homicide is abhorrent, is itself, abhorrent.

I recall a moment in my youth when during the middle of the night I awakened to the unmistakable smell of smoke. The house next door to ours had caught fire and was threatening to consume my family’s house.

An instant later, someone in my family called the fire department. I remember that once the firefighters arrived, they were quick to apply massive amounts of water to the fire because that was the antidote to fire.

Adding more fire would have been counterproductive. Water was needed.

Accordingly, the cycle of calculated, unethical, and immoral acts of homicide in our neighborhoods is not stopped by the state's own brand of calculated, unethical, and immoral homicidal acts called executions in the prisons. Executions exacerbate the cycle of death and force the state to surrender its moral and ethical high ground as it lives in a clear and present moral contradiction, saying how much it protects lives while at the same time, spending millions of dollars to cancel lives and thus replicate the improper death decisions of perpetrators of homicide.

Jesus was once asked to authorize the public stoning execution of a woman caught in adultery. Interestingly, her male counterpart was not convicted and condemned – an early sign of bias in the ethically bankrupt execution business, one that can be seen even now.

When Jesus told the woman's all-male jury that they could stone her only if they were sinless themselves, these men dropped their stones, turned, and walked away because, of course, they were not sin-free. Sparked by love, justice, and a commitment to non-lethal systems of accountability, Jesus threw water on an execution, extinguished death, and redeemed and transformed a life destined to be thrown away.

Out of a sense of love, concern for justice, and a commitment to the redemptive power of God made known through Jesus Christ, the Ohio Council of Churches joins the honorable sponsors of this bill, Senators Antonio and Huffman, and the list of distinguished cosponsors of this bill in their bold and morally correct effort to throw life-enriching water onto raging house fire that is the death penalty.

We support these courageous sponsors as they call on their fellow lawmakers to resist matching immoral death with more immoral death. Fire cannot extinguish fire, only water can do that. No one, regardless of what they have done, should ever be discarded and forever known for the worst thing they ever did.

It is becoming abundantly clear to more and more Ohioans that the death penalty is a hollow instrument of death that offers no justice, no healing, no wholeness, and no redemption. The well-meaning proponents of executions intend to aim millions of dollars in the pointless pursuit of retribution and death when we co-victims want them to aim millions of dollars in the purposeful pursuit of redemption and life!

We call for the end of the death penalty to become a top priority in the Ohio Senate, an action that will thus open the door for the State to invest in true redemption as it redirects funds aimed and canceling lives to caring for the lives of victim families who need restoration not revenge.

For at the end of the proverbial day, revenge pays no rent, heats no homes, buys no bread, heals no hearts, and conveys no closure.

Let the word go forth that SB 101 enjoys the full support of the Ohio Council of Churches. We will lovingly ask churches statewide to ensure that every member of the Ohio General Assembly

receives a multitude of messages from their constituents who want Ohio to extinguish its death penalty.

These amplified and unified voices will be heard from Chillicothe and on up to Cleveland, and from Findlay on down to Cincinnati. Their message will be clear and unmistakable: It is time for Ohio to drop the stones, turn, and walk away from death! It is time to end executions! Speaking with Holy Spirit fervor and clarity, we Christians say no to retribution, and yes to love; no to retaliation and yes to restoration of victim families; no to vengeance and yes to redemption. Thank you.