

House Criminal Justice Committee
Proponent Testimony
Ohio House Bill 183
Written Testimony Only

Elizabeth E. Askue
9/22/2021

Dear Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and the members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

My name is Elizabeth Askue and I am a resident of Columbus. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony on House Bill 183.

I have not been a victim of violence. I have not sat on a death penalty jury. I do not personally know the suffering of someone on death row nor of that person's family. I do not know the family of anyone who has been murdered and their loss and pain. What right do I have to speak to the death penalty?

I am a retired nurse practitioner who has seen how lives are shaped by trauma and mental illness and poverty and racism. There are many elements to each person's journey that mediate who they become. What we call out as individual personality flaws or dysfunctional behavior are often manifestations of years of trauma. And trauma feeds on trauma; it can cause someone to fly off the handle, to do things that don't make sense, to harm others. Society may have failed a person time and again, and only takes notice when a heinous crime is committed. Then we act and punish. Taking a person's life is no excuse for the system's failure to intervene earlier.

More concerning is the number of errors that the judicial system makes. "For every five people Ohio has executed, one has been exonerated from death row." The possibility that an innocent person is executed is inexcusable. By eliminating the death penalty, the likelihood of this state-sanctioned murder of an innocent person is impossible. We are not error-free enough to take a life.

I doubt the death penalty deters any criminal activity. If you have ever watched a person act or react out of anger, there is never a "pause" to reflect on the consequences of one's actions. Where is the evidence that the death penalty is a deterrent? It may be used by prosecutors as a negotiating tool, but it does not stop violence.

Often when I discuss the death penalty with friends and acquaintances, the one fact that catches their attention is cost. "The death penalty is at least three times more expensive than other sentencing options." To save taxpayers money is everyone's goal, and if it costs less to imprison someone without the chance of parole than kill them, then what taxpayer is going to opt for the more expensive option? And these resources can be better used in funding public-safety measures, social service efforts and a justice system that is already taxed.

As a state, we need to repeal the death penalty.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote yes on HB 183. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Elizabeth E. Askue