

House Criminal Justice Committee
Proponent Testimony
House Bill #183 Death Penalty
Written Only

Sr. Alice Gerdeman

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

I am Sr. Alice Gerdeman, a resident of Cincinnati, OH. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 183. I do so not only for myself but as a member of the Congregation of Sisters of Divine Providence.

In 2000, The Sisters of Divine Providence in the United States, after intense prayer and study, took a public stance against the death penalty. We are joined in this stance by our sisters across the world. We saw then that we are called to bring the values of the Gospel to our world and recognized that life today is often devalued. We wanted to affirm the sacredness of all life even of those who have committed the most terrible acts of violence including murder. In 2021, we, Sisters of Divine Providence, are even stronger in our opposition to the death penalty than we were in 2000.

While our convictions are deeply rooted in our faith, we also have “practical” concerns. Our members have been faithful correspondents with prisoners on death row and with several men who have had their sentence of death commuted. Yes, we know exonerees. We see the injustice of a system that has wrongly condemned. Through our work, we see the need to help the families who have lost members to murder and other acts of violence. We encounter children who suffer physical, educational, and psychological want and know that the millions of dollars the State spends on death penalty cases could be much better used on programs that would ultimately prevent suffering and violence in society. We are deeply troubled by the disproportionate number of people of color who are on death row.

We pledged, 21 years ago, to reach out to the families and friends of victims of violence and to hold them in our concerns and prayers. We will continue to do this and we are working to educate our neighbors about the death penalty. More and more people do see the problems in the death penalty system. The time is right to pass legislation to abolish the death penalty in Ohio as has been done in 23 other states.

On a personal note, I have lead prayer outside the Ohio State Penitentiary during the execution of fifty men. The deliberate taking of life pains my soul. None of these men were a danger to society at the time of their execution. Some, I believe, were converted people.

Is it vengeance that leads us, as a State, to kill. Does an execution make us a better people? I pray for you and all Ohio legislators. You hold life in your hands.

Sr. Alice Gerdeman,CDP