

Hello, Chairman LaRe, Vice-Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and House Criminal Justice Committee Members, Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Jasmine Henderson, and I am the Director of Policy and Social Impact for the Ohio Women's Alliance Action Fund. I strongly support House Bill 183 and the abolishment of the death penalty in the state of Ohio.

The Ohio Women's Alliance is an organization rooted in total liberation with a deep investment that we must stop all forms of state-sanctioned violence, including the current authority that the State of Ohio possesses to kill a human. As a reproductive justice organization, we acknowledge this is only the beginning of what complete liberation looks like in the state of Ohio and for the complete elimination of all forms of state-sanctioned violence.

The time is now to pass legislation to abolish the death penalty in Ohio because 59% of Ohioians oppose the death penalty, including 69% of Democrats and 53% of Republicans, making this a bipartisan issue. In addition, the gross racial injustice for death penalty sentencing in Ohio is startling. According to Ohioans to Stop Executions, African Americans only make up 17% of the state's population but makeup 70% of all people sentenced to death in Ohio. Black folks account for 55% of all people on death row, 33% executed, and 72% of those exonerated of those charges.

Research also suggests that the myths around death penalty sentencing being fair and only reserved for those who commit "severe" crimes are inaccurate. It seems that a person's ability to retain counsel and the county where the crime is committed are the two top factors contributing to this type of sentencing. In the state of Ohio, it also seems that a county prosecutor's personal viewpoints seem to contribute to such detrimental outcomes directly. Five of the counties with high racially and ethnically diverse populations are the top sentencing counties for death. The counties include Franklin, Cuyahoga, Hamilton, Lucas, and Summit counties, making up 68% of all death penalty cases in Ohio. This means how this portion of the "law" is executed will be more likely determined by who a person is (race), where the person lives or commits a crime, and also the influence of a county prosecutors' personal views about the death penalty seems to truly be the determining factors in such detrimental sentencing.

Along with these factors, this type of sentencing is inaccurate, and the amount of wrongful convictions seems to be a burden that Ohio can no longer justify or maintain. Since 1973, more than 185 death row cases have been exonerated and released of all charges in Ohio. This means for every five executions, Ohio executes one "innocent" person. The factors contributing to wrongful convictions are eyewitness mistakes, inadequate representation, perjury by witnesses, prosecutorial misconduct, or jurors who don't understand the process.

Right now, we have the right to eliminate the power that the state of Ohio has to execute a person, especially as research and statistics show this particular portion of the carceral system is designed to simply kill and not to establish or determine justice.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote YES on this lifesaving bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.