

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR HB 183

House Criminal Justice Committee Proponent Testimony House Bill  
183 Written Testimony Only [criminaljusticecommittee@ohiohouse.gov](mailto:criminaljusticecommittee@ohiohouse.gov)

Howard Tolley, Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio, September 20, 2021

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

My name is Howard Tolley and I am a resident of Hamilton County, Ohio submitting proponent written testimony on House Bill 183.

As a founding Board President and former Executive Director of Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio, I collaborated with other faith communities in organizing the 83 mile, week-long Walk to Stop Executions from Lucasville to Columbus in 2015. Our first UU Principle affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and our Catholic partners in the abolitionist movement advocate a consistent ethic of life from conception to natural death.

As a political science professor at Wilberforce University I learned about the disparate impact of the death penalty on African American defendants. As a law school graduate and professor at the University of Cincinnati I celebrated the success of the Innocence Project in obtaining release of those wrongfully convicted, and I witnessed the Ohio Supreme Court's thirteen reversals of Hamilton County death penalty verdicts accompanied by rebukes for overzealous prosecution.

Ironically, Ohio's attempt to execute and save the costs of life incarceration has proven too costly for small rural jurisdictions, unable to afford the \$16 million expense for capital trials.

In my research on international human rights I discovered that European tribunals refuse to extradite criminals to the U.S. who might

be placed on death row and subjected to inhumane treatment. Several botched executions in Ohio, including the 2009 unsuccessful two hour effort to execute Romell Broom, put us to shame. He died last December of COVID while awaiting a rescheduled execution date in 2024.

No other Western industrialized democracy employs capital punishment, and 23 states in the U.S. and Washington D.C. have abolished the death penalty. Why does Ohio continue to use a penalty we condemn when carried out in China, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran?

Please support the abolition bill for consideration and then approval by the full House and Ohio Senate.

Thanks for your consideration.

Howard Tolley, PhD, JD, Professor Emeritus, University of Cincinnati  
Founding Board President and former Executive Director, UUJO