

Statement in Support of SB 103
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Chairperson Manning, Vice-Chairperson McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and all of the distinguished members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I begin by acknowledging here today that the public has every right to be outraged over violent and horrific acts that distort or destroy the lives of our fellow citizens, our neighbors, public servants, and more. To be very specific, family members of murdered persons, often called co-victims, a label that I myself have been forced to wear, are justified in harboring feelings of rage and anger over the killing of our loved ones.

Our sentiments are reactions to the calculated, unethical, and immoral decision making that drove other human beings to engage in grotesque, murderous 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 question before us is: How do we best respond to rightfully and credibly convicted people who have angered us and hurt us the most through their grotesque, murderous acts?

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, a 102-year-old ecumenical agency that brings together 17 Christian denominations in Ohio. Through these intersecting identities, I am poised 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.

When rivers swell and flood our communities, and I experienced such flooding a few years ago as a resident of downtown Findlay, Ohio, no life-honoring responders would dare add more water to a flood for such would be counterproductive. Instead, they would try to stop the flow of water to stop the flooding.

Accordingly, murder, which represents the worst outcome of the cycle of calculated, unethical, and immoral acts in our neighborhoods, is not prevented by the State's own brand of calculated, unethical, and immoral homicidal acts called executions. Essentially, executions only exacerbate the cycle of death as they inflict reputational damage onto the state and erode its moral credibility and sense of integrity.

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. (We would be poor stewards of history if we did not acknowledge past and present bias, particularly racial bias, in the death penalty enterprise.)

When Jesus told the woman's all male jury that they could stone her only if they were sinless themselves, the jurors walked away because, of course, they were not sin free. Sparked by love, justice, and redemption, Jesus disrupted an execution and redeemed a life destined to be thrown away.

Out of an abundance of love and concern for justice, restoration, and redemption, the Ohio Council of Churches calls on Ohio legislators to avoid adding water to a flood, and to resist matching calculated, unethical, and immoral death with the state's brand of the same. No

one, regardless of who they are or what they have done, should ever be discarded. If the God of Cain, Moses, David, and Paul – all murderers – does not throw problematic people away, should not the State's values reflect those of God instead of those of the homicidal people it condemns?

We join Senators Antonio, Huffman, and their distinguished bipartisan array of colleagues in calling for the end of death penalty in Ohio, for it is a hollow instrument of death that offers no justice, no healing, no wholeness, and no redemption.

Instead of investing millions of taxpayer dollars in the false promises of the quicksand of retribution, the State must follow its moral compass to avoid the quicksand and instead invest those funds of hard-working Ohioans in real the promise that is achieved through the restoration of co-victims and their families whose needs cannot be satisfied by executions. We urge you to adopt Senate Bill 103, and send Ohio's death penalty to the only place it truly belongs: The Ohio History Connection. Thank you.