

House Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony
House Bill 259
Written Testimony Only

Bekky Baker

10/10/2023

Dear Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Bekky Baker and I am a Program Director at Ignite Peace, formerly the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJPC) in Cincinnati. Thank you for this opportunity to submit proponent testimony on Ohio House Bill 259.

As a social worker, I have had the opportunity to meet and work with people from so many different walks of life. I have lived and worked in the rural parts of our state as well as within the inner city of Cincinnati. It is both haunting and inspiring to meet death row exonerees. People who have been sentenced to die by their state, by a system that is meant to keep them safe, hold tenacity, heart and strength along with gut wrenching trauma. I met Elwood Jones via email when he was still incarcerated. I heard his story of tirelessly working for nearly 30 years to prove his innocence. I was in the courtroom when he was granted a new trial. Elwood will be Ohio's twelfth death row exoneree.

We cannot continue to maintain a system that is more concerned with vengeance and conviction rates rather than accountability, truth, healing and justice. Studies show that when we prioritize resources for families, when we support early childhood interventions and education, we save money in the long run on prison costs and public benefit costs. Yet, we continue to pump money into imprisoning people and putting them to death.

The time is now. It is time to end the death penalty. It is time to build communities centered on recognizing the humanity in our neighbors. We cannot continue to kill people, who kill people, to show that killing people is wrong. We cannot lose sight of redemption and our community's safety does not hinge upon meting out death sentences but rather on the relationships we build with one another. The Ohio legislature has the opportunity to abolish an arbitrary, racist system and support people who need healing and restitution by passing House Bill 259. Let's lead the rest of the nation in this momentous movement to abolish the death penalty.

Bekky Baker, MSW, Program Director