

# OHIOANS TO STOP EXECUTIONS

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and distinguished Members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for your service to the people of Ohio.

My name is Allison Cohen and I am the executive director of Ohioans to Stop Executions (OTSE for short). Founded in 1988, we are the only organization in Ohio solely dedicated to repealing the death penalty. Our over 10,000 members and more than 80 supporting organizations represent the views of millions of Ohioans.

Over the past ten years, I have personally witnessed the inevitable decline of Ohio's death penalty. When I started working for OTSE in 2012, Ohio was an active death penalty state—we were executing people roughly every other month.

Yet, one after another I have watched death penalty supporters change their minds or join us to say it's simply not worth it.

I have listened to victims' family members conclude that the system they believed would deliver justice instead hurt them even more.

I have heard from prison staff and members of law enforcement say the death penalty has made their jobs harder.

I have seen editorial page after editorial page – from every region of the State – articulate the many reasons why Ohio would be better off without the death penalty.

I have seen more and more of our elected representatives – from both sides of the aisle – acknowledge the failings of the death penalty and fight to persuade our State to end it.

There are people behind me who have dedicated decades of their life to ending the death penalty. This committee should take note of their numbers, their passion, their diversity of perspectives, and the unanimity of their conclusions.

I'd like to read a quote from Attorney General Yost's most recent Capital Crimes Report. This report is issued annually and serves as a summary on how Ohio's death penalty is faring. It reads:

*This system satisfies nobody. Those who oppose the death penalty want it abolished altogether, not ticking away like a time bomb that might or might not explode. Those who support the death penalty want it to be fair, timely and effective. Neither side is getting what it wants while the state goes on pointlessly burning through enormous taxpayer resources.*

*If we were starting from scratch to design a system for the ultimate punishment — whether that punishment is execution, or instead, life in prison without parole — neither death-penalty opponents nor death-penalty supporters would create anything like Ohio's current system, which produces churn, waste, and endless lawsuits and nothing else.*

*Ohio's residents and their elected leaders should make one of two decisions: Either overhaul the capital punishment system to make it effective, or end it.*

Distinguished members of this committee, I am here to say that Ohio's death penalty can not be fixed. We've been trying to "overhaul" the system for decades. In fact, a bipartisan task force of prosecutors, law enforcement officials, defense attorneys and other legal experts already studied the flaws with the death penalty in depth over a decade ago. They went through a years-long process trying to think through possible solutions to the problems that plague Ohio's death penalty. For over forty years, the people of our state have tried, with the very best of intentions, to justify our attachment to capital punishment.

But here we are, all these years later, burning through taxpayer money for what? Making more promises we can't keep to victims' families for what? As our sponsors testified last week, there is absolutely zero credible evidence that the death penalty deters violent crime or makes society any safer. Even Christopher Becker with the Trumbull County Prosecutor's office admitted in his testimony last session against former House Bill 183 to end the death penalty, it is not a deterrent to crime, saying, "I don't think any of the criminal statutes are a deterrent. And I think to think otherwise is to fool yourself. It is absolutely to fool yourself."

This system satisfies nobody.

House Bill 259 asks you to confront, once and for all, what the death penalty actually does to us all in real life.

The death penalty has failed Ohio on every count. It is unfair. It is racially biased. It fails to keep us safe. It is arbitrarily applied. It is expensive. It is wasteful. It harms the family members of victims. It threatens to put an innocent person to death.

I urge you to consider the gravity of these insurmountable problems — weighing down the death penalty until it is literally collapsing under the weight of its own problems.

And if you believe nothing else, you must believe that human beings cannot be perfectly right 100% of the time. For all the time and care we take, we are still human; we still risk error and arbitrary decisions. And when life— is on the line, we can not abide these inevitable mistakes.

The question before you, collectively, is what to do about it.

This is a unique and wonderful moment in our state's history. I urge you to seize it and end the death penalty. Thank you very much, I'm happy to answer any questions.