

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

My name is Jonathan Mann. I am here as a representative of those who've lost loved ones to violence and oppose the death penalty. In 2017, my father was murdered and the person who killed him got the death penalty. I am one of hundreds of people who find themselves at the mercy of Ohio's death penalty, reopening our wounds with every court proceeding and every media encounter. While our circumstances differ, we are part of a fraternity that bonds us for life. My journey and suffering mirror closely with every single person I've spoken to who's lost someone they love to murder. I say that so anyone listening can understand two things:

1. The system is broken and creates unnecessary pain for all families who have lost loved ones to murder.
2. While you're listening to Jonathan Mann, know that you aren't. I happen to be the person standing here who accepted re-opening a wound in hopes that this committee will listen. A few years ago, I accepted that taking this pain to protect others like me was worthwhile. If I could help prevent one person from the hellish experience of a death penalty case, I will do whatever it takes. I've never done anything more valuable as a human being. Giving myself to something far greater than me has provided purpose and comfort. I do this to honor my father and to stand up for people who can't do it themselves.

I'd like to describe part of my experience as a person who's trapped in the tangled web of Ohio's death penalty. Ohio offers assistance to family members primarily through the prosecutor's office. That means that when a crime goes unsolved, families of victims are automatically barred from those resources. The Victims Of Crime Act (VOCA) fund offers assistance through an application process. When I was first going through this process, I was told I was ineligible to receive state-provided burial help and counseling support for my father's murder because he had drugs in his system at the time of his death. I was then told that the state would spend millions of dollars seeking death for the person who killed him. Between 2018 and 2020, there was a 67 percent drop in [VOCA funds awarded to Ohio](#), from \$117 million to \$58 million. Ohio Attorney Dave Yost was quoted saying, "If we don't get help in the next year or two, you're going to see significant parts of the state that just don't have any access to service". Ohio is wasting money chasing death sentences it won't carry out while leaving impacted families twisting in the wind.

My family and I have become trapped in the legal system. There is no end in sight, and family members of murder victims wait decades for the process to end. There is no path to closure, healing, or justice in sight. This situation is quite common. Proponents of the death penalty often say we need the death penalty for victims but do not address the reality of what that means. How does this sound like justice? Do you think I can feel closure knowing I have to wait at a minimum of 15 years before my Dad's killer exhausts his appeals? I have no choice but to focus on his appellate process every step of the way. Michael O'Malley could've worked out a plea agreement and ended this case years ago. The cumulative impact of the pain of the case, waiting, and uncertainty is toxic. The well-being of family members of murder victims isn't focused on even remotely as much chasing headlines and sound bytes.

Violent crime hasn't dropped despite our insistence on retaining the death penalty. Meanwhile, funds are drying up for family members of victims, yet the State continues to pursue expensive capital cases in lieu of cheaper, more efficient options that provide justice and promote healing. Alternatives to capital punishment have shown to have a significant positive impact on family members of murder victims.

How much more sacrifice do family members of victims provide in order to facilitate change? It's time to end this wasteful, ineffective form of justice. I thank the committee for your time and I'm happy to take any questions.