

Good morning, Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today in favor of House Bill 259, and thank you, Representative Schmidt and Representative Miller, for championing this important legislation. My name is Stephanie Ranade Krider and I am the former executive director of Ohio Right to Life. In my retirement from politics, I now run a ministry for pregnant women, moms and babies through Life Vineyard Church, of which I am a member. Today I am speaking as a private citizen still very active and interested in advocating for human dignity.

I am here today because I believe in preserving human life. That includes the life of a baby in a mother's womb, the life of someone with terminal illness, and, yes, the life of someone who has committed horrific violence.

Many conversations take place in this building centered on rights and what it means to be pro-life, and certainly those conversations are happening more right now outside of these halls - at the dinner table, among friends and in public gathering places. But I want to speak more specifically to human dignity, which is the basis for my own pro-life beliefs and which informs a larger ethic by which to live and think.

Two things have led me to action on this issue and the reason I'm here today: working with women in the 43205 zip code, where there is certainly more interaction with the criminal justice system than in my own personal life, and the work of Bryan Stevenson who wrote the book *Just Mercy*. Human dignity is what I fight for on behalf of women who face seemingly insurmountable odds to give birth and care for their families, and I've come to realize it's exactly what Stevenson fights for through his organization, Equal Justice Initiative.

Stevenson's book traces the death penalty to the darkest chapters in our country's history: slavery, the lynching of Black men, Jim Crow segregation. The numbers here in Ohio betray a system that overwhelmingly values white life over Black life. As I'm sure others here to testify to today will tell you, the data shows that Black defendants are more likely to receive a death sentence if the victim is white. In Hamilton County, [a study showed](#) that a black defendant with at least one white victim faced odds of receiving a death sentence more than five times higher than all other cases. On top of that, over half of the people on Ohio's death row are Black, while Black people make up only 13% of the total population of Ohio. It is said that history does not repeat itself so much as it rhymes. As long as the death penalty remains on the books in Ohio, we are complicit in this horrific legacy of racial violence. We ought to strive to respect all life equally.

Stevenson's book also follows the story of Walter McMillan, an innocent Black man who was sent to death row in Alabama. Again, as I'm sure others will testify, Ohio has a particularly terrible track record when it comes to sentencing innocent people to die. Eleven people have already been exonerated, and others are still languishing on death row despite overwhelming evidence of their innocence. The death penalty is an affront to human dignity regardless of

innocence, but the idea that we could have executed someone who did not commit the crime is unconscionable.

Defending the right to life of the unborn is not entirely the same as defending the right to life of someone who has committed a horrific crime. It is frankly difficult to say that people who have taken a life should be able to live out their own until natural death. However, it isn't a great leap in logic. If others believe, as I do, that all human lives are deserving of dignity as image-bearers of our Creator God, as people who hold *all* life sacred, we can defend both. We must speak out for human dignity and against efforts to rob others of it. Our laws are inconsistent in this regard both for unborn life and for those subject to the death penalty.

Service of justice from the death penalty is a fiction. The reality is that the death penalty targets, intentionally or not, people of color, the mentally ill, those who can't afford proper representation, and other vulnerable people. The fact is, Ohio can keep our communities safe and hold people accountable-- even those who have themselves taken a life-- without the death penalty.

I'll end with a quote from theologian Francis Schaeffer: "If man is not made in the image of God, nothing then stands in the way of inhumanity."

I want to thank the committee for allowing me the chance to speak on this issue today. I believe that a vote for House Bill 259 is a vote that affirms the inherent value and dignity in all life.