

Senate Judiciary Committee  
Senate Bill 101  
Written Testimony Only

RYAN SCHELLENBERG

November 13, 2023

Dear Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

As a resident of Worthington, Ohio, and a faculty member at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, I am grateful for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on Ohio Senate Bill 101.

As a person of faith, my opposition to the death penalty is rooted in my conviction that life is sacred. It is a central message of the Christian Scriptures that humans are created in the image of God. All people are beloved by their Creator, including those who have done unspeakable evil. To kill a child of God in name of justice is to encroach arrogantly on God's own jurisdiction.

Biblical language is sometimes used to defend the death penalty. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," it is said. But in fact the teaching of Jesus explicitly rejects this principle (Matthew 5:38). Understood in the larger context of the Christian Scriptures, there is no warrant in the legal codes of the Old Testament for the modern death penalty. On the contrary, what the Bible does teach plainly is not to return evil for evil (Romans 12:17).

What is more, the death penalty is ineffective. There is no evidence that it deters crime. Those who commit murder seldom pause to reflect rationally on the consequences of their actions.

Nor does the death penalty meaningfully address the pain and grief of those who have been harmed by crime. As a theological educator, I have spoken in churches across Ohio, leading conversations about harm, justice, and healing. Victims of crime regularly tell me about their anger, how they have wanted to see perpetrators suffer. But they also tell me how hollow it feels when perpetrators do face punishment. In the end, the state's retribution does not bring back loved ones. It does not undo trauma. It does not bring closure.

Please vote to approve Ohio Senate Bill 101 and end the death penalty in Ohio.

Sincerely,

Ryan Schellenberg  
Associate Professor of New Testament  
Methodist Theological School in Ohio