



A Better Way Foundation is a Connecticut non-profit organization that is dedicated to a sensible shift in drug policy from one of incarceration to substance abuse treatment and public health.

March 4, 2009

**Testimony of Lorenzo Jones in support of Raised H.B. No. 6578:
An Act Concerning the Penalty for a Capital Felony to the Judiciary Committee**

Hello Judiciary Committee members, Ranking members, and Chairs. Thank you for the opportunity to submit a favorable testimony for Raised House Bill 6578 - An Act Concerning the Penalty for a Capital Felony.

Currently I serve as the Executive Director of A Better Way Foundation based in Hartford, CT. A Better Way Foundation is a statewide not for profit that advocates for reform of Connecticut's criminal justice system from incarceration first to a public health, education and treatment.

I submit this testimony today not only as an advocate for reform but also as a parent of three who believes that despite our criminal justice system best efforts to protect me and my family, mistakes happen. These mistakes coupled with the problem of limited resources to defend people coming from marginalized communities can have drastic results on our local cities and state.

The Judiciary Committee, better than most, know examples of people being wrongfully convicted in Connecticut. Most recently the case of James Tillman, a man wrongfully convicted of rape and served eighteen years in prison is a prime example. While this is one of the most recent and a popular case, the reality is that the criminal justice system is subject to human error and not only Mr. Tillman but also our cities and towns bare the brunt of that human error. You all have worked tirelessly to address these inequities for nearly twenty years and those efforts as well as James Tillman are valuable to me. We lost him for 18 years. We could have lost him forever. While the Mr. Tillman's case may seem extreme it really did happen. It happened to him, it happened to my community, it happened to us. Very rarely are we in a position to see the ultimate unintended consequence of our actions but today we can see them and we all can do something about it.

I do not have a family member on death row, nor do I know anyone on death row or know Mr. Tillman personally, but I have family members who have been victims of violent crimes. I do have many family members whom have been murdered in cold blood, physically violated, and abused and while revenge is still a fleeting thought, the perpetrators death never appealed to me as a solution. To be more frank I say this having never known those violations of my children and God forbid I would ever but should I do

and my personal feelings clouded my faith the reality would still be the same, state sponsored execution is not a solution or a credible rationale for revenge.

In closing, my faith in God rebukes the notion that “an eye for and eye” is a human right or should be a law. Thus the death penalty can never be an appropriate response to violence. I believe the right to determine if a person lives or dies rest with God even if the person to be executed ignored that right. With the realities of human error, systemic inequality and limited resources mental or monetary an absolute decision like execution puts us all at risk of continuing many of the unintended consequences we have all fought so hard to end. The death penalty is absolute but the criminal justice system shouldn't be.

Thank you for your time.

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