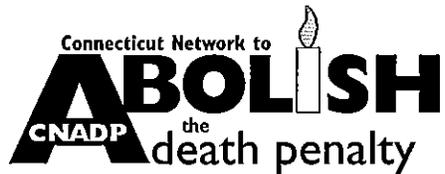


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## Judiciary Committee Public Hearing

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

### TESTIMONY OF BEN JONES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CONNECTICUT NETWORK TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY

#### In SUPPORT of HB-6578 *AN ACT CONCERNING THE PENALTY FOR A CAPITAL FELONY*

Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor, distinguished members of the committee: My name is Ben Jones, and I am the executive director of the Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty or CNADP. Though the CNADP's mission is total abolition of Connecticut's death penalty, we strongly support raised bill 6578. This measure will dramatically limit the death penalty's scope and move the state toward eliminating this dying, wasteful, and ineffective practice.

When terrible violence occurs, the citizens of our state deserve a response that fairly punishes the guilty, prevents further violence, and attends to victims' needs. On all these counts, the death penalty is an utter failure.

First, the death penalty continues to be applied in a discriminatory, capricious, and arbitrary manner. Though we have advanced beyond the days when Blacks would end up on death row for thefts of only a few dollars, race and socio-economic standing still play a disturbing role in the death penalty's application. One of the best predictors of who receives the death penalty is the victim's race—specifically, cases involving white victims result in death sentences at higher rates than those involving black or Latino victims. Furthermore, the death penalty is a punishment reserved primarily for the poor: 95% of death row inmates cannot afford

their own attorney. Sadly, capital punishment remains a cruel lottery biased against marginalized groups.

Second, the death penalty fails to keep us more secure. There is no compelling evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than life in prison without parole. Though reasonable people can disagree on the magnitude of the death penalty's deterrent effect, one point is clear: there are smarter ways to fight crime than by spending millions of extra dollars on the death penalty, a punishment consistently shown to be more costly than life imprisonment. When asked the best ways to deter violent crime, police chiefs overwhelmingly recommend drug abuse prevention and more police officers over the death penalty. In this time of budget shortfall, our wasteful system of capital punishment makes no sense as a response to the serious problem of violent crime.

Finally, the death penalty increases the pain of those impacted by violence. Whenever a prosecutor wins a death sentence, victims' families lose. The death penalty keeps cases in the public eye for years and deprives families of the privacy they often need to heal. A shorter appeals process cannot be the answer, given that it takes over nine years on average to exonerate the innocent on death row. Cut short the appeals process, and the state will execute innocent lives. The appropriate response is life imprisonment—it addresses the needs of victims' families, keeps society secure, and avoids the irreversible error of executing the innocent.

For these reasons, the CNADP urges the committee to recommend raised bill 6578.