

Testimony in Support of HB-6425 and SB-1035

DEATH PENALTY DEBATE

No human should ever have to endure what Dr. Petit and his family have gone through. Hayes and Komisarjevsky are the worst of the worst. The jury in the Hayes case was correct that he should receive the most severe sentence that our state judicial system offers. The issue facing us is what that worst punishment should be. This issue is beyond any individual case.

Sometimes crimes are particularly heinous and prosecutors are pressured to respond to the public outcry that "someone must pay for this". This can create a context in which innocent people are falsely accused or set up by the real perpetrator of the crime. Since 1973, 138 people on death row were exonerated on evidence of innocence. This was roughly 10 percent of the 1203 executions that took place. Execution is irreversible.

Because the death penalty is so severe there must be an extensive appeals process to be sure that no innocent person dies. Even in cases like the Cheshire home invasion where evidence against the defendants seems clear, these legal processes still are and should be in place. These processes are expensive. The cost of the death penalty to taxpayers is staggering. A study in California showed that the state would save \$126 million annually by replacing the death penalty with life without parole. New Jersey saved over \$11 million when its abolition legislation was passed. It is estimated that Connecticut spends about \$4 million each year on death penalty cases.

The states that have abolished the death penalty have seen no spike in crime and, in fact, tend to have lower crime rates than those states that have it. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Marshall said, "The death penalty is no more effective as a deterrent than life imprisonment. It is also evident that the burden of capital punishment falls upon poor and underprivileged members of society."

One way our values as a nation or state are measured is by our maximum sentence for a crime. Do we really want to give the government the right to kill? Currently, two thirds of the countries in the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Ninety percent of the world's executions take place in 5 countries:

- 1-China
- 2-Iran
- 3- Iraq
- 4-Saudi Arabia
- 5-United States

We ask - is this the group of nations with which we want to be associated in terms of our human rights policies?

Eventually this barbaric practice will end - but when? This may not be a popular time to take a stand against the death penalty. But there is never a wrong time to do the right thing. Gov. Jodi M. Rell made the politically easy choice when she vetoed the last bill passed by the state legislature which would have abolished the death penalty. Our legislators and new governor must educate themselves on the issue and then have the backbone to vote their consciences. When we change the maximum penalty to life without parole, the money we save could be put towards crime control measures, mental

health services for victims and their families, drug prevention programs, etc. The focus then can be on healing for the victim's family.

While it is tempting, especially in cases like the Petit one, to want the criminals to suffer the ultimate punishment, civilized society should punish cruelty without practicing it. The state should provide us with security, not vengeance. Then, we will truly honor the meaning of justice.

Amnesty International takes the position that the death penalty should be abolished. This is an important decision. Please educate yourself before you decide your own position. Possible sources for information to help with death penalty education are:

Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty

www.cnadp.org

tel (860)231-1489

Amnesty International

www.amnestyusa.org/abolish

tel (800)266-3789

Death Penalty Information Center

www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

Signed:

Alan Horwitz, Stony Creek, 860-227-5388

Paul Gustafson, Madison, 203-318-5054

Nell Okie, Madison, 203-745-9188

Peter Stolzman, Branford, 203-483-9543

Katy Reddick, Durham, 860-349-1768

Robin Whitney, Madison, 203-245-3892

Christine Rogers, Ivoryton, 860-767-3143

Sally Koslik, Guilford, 203-533-5491

Betsy Hodgson, Guilford, 203-887-2211

Robert Nave, Waterbury, 203-206-9854

John McGannon, Westbrook, 860-399-1254

Aidan Moran, Clinton, 860-460-7750

Brian Harmon, Madison, 203-245-2866

Virginia Perkins, Ivoryton, 860-227-6490

Bryan Perkins, Ivoryton, 860-767-8022

Barbara Blake, Branford, 203-488-4518

Note: The signers are members of the Shoreline Chapter of Amnesty International