

**Testimony from Victoria Coward
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In support of Senate Bill 1035 and House Bill 6425

My first-born, Tyler, was a drummer at our church and going to school to create a bright future for himself.

A knock on the door from police informed me that, at just 18 years old, Tyler had been shot and killed. No one who hasn't lost a child can understand this devastation. An added layer of grief came from the fact that it took two years to find the man who killed my son. Then, when the killer was arrested, I was shocked at the lack of attention my son's case received. Kids are dying every week - there were more killings in New Haven just last week - and sometimes it seems like no one notices.

But we pay attention to the death penalty. We invest thousands of hours and millions of dollars on a handful of capital cases. Meanwhile, hundreds of other murders take place and go unmentioned. This will never make sense to me. Murder is murder. And losing a child to violence is the worst thing that could ever happen to anyone. It's painful that the death penalty forces us to act as if some losses are deeper than others. I feel for the mother of the offenders as well. I couldn't live with having a handshake in someone else's death. Each and every person who has lost a child to murder deserves the full love and support of their community.

You've been given a letter that's been signed by 81 victims' families asking for an end to our harmful death penalty system, it states:

Some believe that they stand with victims' families by supporting the death penalty for "particularly heinous murders." We have difficulty understanding this position. The implication is that other murders are ordinary and do not merit the death penalty. From experience, we can tell you that every murder is heinous, a tragedy for the lost one's family. The death penalty has the effect of elevating certain victims' families above others. Connecticut should be better than that.

There were 24 homicides in my community of New Haven last year. That's 24 mothers. Each life deserves to be valued. Not matter where or how the crime is committed. Each of us deserves to be heard. And each of us has powerful needs like help navigating the legal system, help covering basic expenses like funerals, and ongoing counseling.

It is shameful that we spend millions of dollars and countless hours on a few capital cases when there are so many of us with so many needs unmet. Just last month 16 New Haven police officers were laid off. Instead of the police union President suggesting those in New Haven "arm themselves", we could get rid of the death penalty and use the money for much-needed police.

The death penalty doesn't help victims. The death penalty is a painful distraction from our real needs. I hope that you will vote to repeal the death penalty in Connecticut.