

Representative Fox, Senator Cole, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Shanna York and I'm here today to express my opposition to the abolition of the death penalty in Connecticut. I am fully aware of this committee's position regarding the death penalty. I am also fully aware of Governor Malloy's intent to abolish the death penalty.

Abolitionists claim that the death penalty is revenge. It is not. It is justice. Revenge is defined as to avenge as oneself in retaliation in kind. Justice is defined as the assignment of merited rewards or punishments by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims. Each of the men who are currently on death row here in Connecticut earned their placement there because their actions warranted it as dictated by the law.

Abolitionists will argue that death row inmates are people, human beings, and that they have rights. Each of these men has victims, four of whom have two or more victims. Each of these victims are people too, human beings, flesh and blood. Each of them had rights but they were stripped of those rights and of their lives by the men on death row.

Abolitionists claim that the cost of executing a criminal is far more expensive than incarcerating one for life. Execution figures factor in the cost of an inmate's numerous appeals. Figures representing the cost to keep a prisoner alive do not include the numerous appeals. "Lifers" are equally likely to pursue the same avenues as death row inmates to overturn their fate, which can be equally expensive. The effectiveness of the death penalty is also questioned. Capital punishment permanently removes the worst criminals from society and proves much safer than long term or permanent incarceration. Life in prison without parole does not always mean that a criminal will truly remain in prison.

~ Stacey Lannert was convicted for the 1990 murder of her sexually abusive father, served 18 years of a life sentence before receiving a full pardon by outbound Missouri Governor Matt Blunt in January, 2009. She was pardoned of a murder that would be considered revenge in the truest sense of the word.

~ Lisa Connelly, one of seven responsible for the 1993 Florida murder of Bobby Kent, was able to reduce her sentence of life in prison to 22 years upon appeal. In 2004 Connelly was released despite being one of the primary planners of the slaying of Bobby Kent.

Given enough time and enough resources, yesterday's killers may become today's lifers and tomorrow's parolees. It is self evident that dead criminals can't commit any further murders either within society or within prison. Again, one solid truth is that the death penalty prevents a person who has already killed before and been executed for it from ever harming anyone ever again.

Abolitionists argue that the death penalty doesn't deter people from committing murder. How does anyone know that for sure? There is no way to measure how many people have been deterred by it. Those people have never and will never appear in any statistics anywhere. That

argument is immeasurable. The murder rate in the United States dropped from 24,562 to 18,209 from 1993 to 1997, a 26% reduction, during a time of increased use of the death penalty. 311 or 62% of 500 executions had been carried out during this time frame. Connecticut has executed one man, Michael Ross. As it stands now our death penalty is as effective as the parent that never follows through with the discipline that they preach.

Abolitionists like to argue that the death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment. Cruel and unusual punishment is defined as punishment due to suffering and humiliation of the condemned person. I hardly think that an IV in the arm followed by an injection of a combination of chemicals or medications can qualify as cruel and unusual. I certainly find it extremely difficult to see it that way when someone like Stanley Edwards is beaten to death with a sledgehammer, when someone like Julia Ashe is kidnapped, raped, and killed, or when someone like Jennifer Hawke-Petit and her daughters Hayley and Michaela are tortured, raped, doused in gas, and set on fire. I ask the committee, who is it that truly receives the cruel and unusual punishment? It is not the death row inmate.

On February 9th I watched some of our state's victims' families gather to speak in opposition to the death penalty. My heart went out to each person who spoke and for each of their loved ones. But it confused me to hear that these folks were offering the reasoning that capital trials and death penalty cases don't help with the healing process for a victim. I never thought that our judicial system ever had anything to do with the healing process. Our judicial system exists for the sole purpose of punishment when people break the law. Do I think that the system re-victimizes people? Yes, I do. And I think that there need to be changes made to the process of capital trials and death penalty cases. But it saddened me to hear that some of the victims mentioned the judicial process in the same sentence as healing. No healing will ever be found in any courtroom--capital trial, death penalty, or not.

Finally for the record, I would like to state that I am here today as a resident of this state, a tax payer, and a registered voter. I am not a victim nor do I intend to become a victim. But that's just the point isn't it? No one ever intends to become a victim do they? Stanley Edwards, Julia Ashe, Jennifer, Hayley, and Michaela Petit, or any of the other people from around the state who were handed a death sentence never had any choice about it and never had anyone standing there next to them to guarantee them their rights did they? Should the day ever come where something happens to me or a member of my family I want to know that the State of Connecticut will seek justice. Unfortunately this committee has proven otherwise.

To quote Dr. William Petit: "Justice is not a word with which the State of Connecticut is familiar."