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Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly Judiciary Committee  
March 14, 2012

**In Support of Raised Bill SB 280 - An Act Revising the Penalty for Capital Felonies.**

We are writing in support of SB 280. For too long, this legislative body has discussed this topic. For too long the debates have centered on the emotional nightmare of a few prominent and affluent families who sought the death penalty as punishment for the accused in their particular situation. Now is the time for a rational and objective discussion on the "merits" of the death penalty.

Since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1973, Connecticut has experienced almost 5,000 violent murders, 15 individuals sentenced to death and one executed. To entertain the argument that the death penalty is a deterrent to violent crime seems absurd in the fact of these statistics. Who among us believes that the thought of the death penalty crosses the mind of a person committing a violent act? It is time to honestly admit that the death penalty is nothing more than state sanctioned execution. It continues only to appease a minority in our State. Have you, our elected representatives, listened to the families of the victims who have asked that the death penalty be abolished? These are the courageous families speaking out and asking that you not kill in their name. These are the families that do not want to keep re-living the violence over and over with every court appearance and appeal that is filed. These are the families that are asking to move on with their lives, and let their grieving and healing process begin.

Nationally, since 1973, 138 individuals on death row have been exonerated. Proponents of the death penalty may argue that 138 individuals may not sound like an alarming number of mistakes, but even one (1) innocent person sitting on death row, or incarcerated, is an injustice. We cannot afford to continue using a broken system.

Perhaps we have never executed an innocent person, but we have incarcerated innocent individuals in Connecticut – James Tillman, Miguel Roman, Kenneth Ireland, George Gould, and Ronald Taylor. Collectively, they spent over 90 years in prison. 90 years because of eye witness misrepresentation, prosecutorial misconduct, police coercion, and/or inadequate representation. Geography, ethnicity and socio-economic status also play critical roles in determining who receives the death penalty. Four of Connecticut's death row inmates are from Waterbury, a city that makes up only 3% of the state's population.

Annually, the State spends approximately \$4 million dollars to maintain the death penalty. At the end of the year, what have we to show for this expenditure? We have not provided services to the families of violent crime, we have not addressed the root causes for violence, nor have we used the money to improve law enforcement. There is a less expensive and better alternative, i.e., incarceration without the possibility of parole. We support SB 280 and encourage our legislators to do the same.

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