

Testimony to Senate Judiciary Committee, In support of SB -280

Gail Southard Canzano, PhD
81 South Main St.
West Hartford, CT 06107

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I'm Dr. Gail Canzano. I'm a clinical psychologist and a family member of a murder victim. □

Some years ago my brother-in-law was the victim of an especially savage and brutal murder. My family was immensely fortunate in that ours was not a capital case. On the eve of jury selection, a plea bargain sent the murderer to prison for 30 years with a guarantee that he would serve every day of his sentence. He was put away and we have put him out of our minds. He'll be an old man by the time he's released. □

Families deserve to focus on themselves and their healing after a homicide and they need all of their energies to do this. The death penalty maintains a focus on the murderer, the judicial system holds out a promise that it cannot keep and the surviving family members are lured down a road that saps their energy and brings nothing but heartache as they wait for an execution that never comes.

As a clinical psychologist, I have many years of experience treating individuals suffering from the effects of trauma. And from a professional standpoint I can assure you that the death penalty is nothing but harmful to the families of murder victims. After the trauma of homicide, the mental health needs of survivors are paramount. Unfortunately, the judicial process in capital cases exacerbates the vulnerability of homicide survivors. First and foremost the families of murder victims need help disengaging from the traumatic event. This is not possible so long as they are ensnared in the legal process with its focus on the offender. □

I would like to note for the record that more than a decade ago, the American Psychiatric Association called for an end to executions. They were soon joined by the American Psychological Association as well as the National Association of Social Workers. Please listen to the experts who would tell you that the harm done by the death penalty far outweighs any good that might come of it. There is nothing accomplished by the death penalty that is not better accomplished by Life in Prison Without the Possibility of Release. □

Capital punishment is an inherently destructive act. It perpetuates violence, wastes money on murderers and impedes the healing of homicide survivors. All of this so that we might punish a handful of deviants? Murderers deserve to be put away and forgotten and the survivors of homicide deserve to be released from their grip.

If legislators are serious about supporting the families of murder victims, they will replace the death penalty with Life in Prison Without the Possibility of Release. And they will commit the millions of dollars that are now being squandered to provide real services for the survivors of homicide.