

Testimony for Repeal of the Death Penalty in Support of SB 280
Black Student Alliance at Yale
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I am Nia Holston, sophomore at Yale University, representing the Black Student Alliance at Yale as their Political Action Chair. We express our voice in support of the abolition of the death penalty in Connecticut.

We do so out of a strong conviction that the death penalty in its current practice does not provide for the fair and just treatment of all individuals under the law of the United States. The death penalty does not provide for equal protection under the law, and African-Americans are often overrepresented in cases where the death penalty is used. In fact, more than half of the 3300 people in the United States on death row are people of color. Even more striking, African Americans make up 42% of the defendants on death row. Despite the decades of research that displays that the death penalty is unequally administered to people of color, the courts' and legislature's refusal to deal with racial bias in a concrete way is demonstrative of the fundamental flaws in the American criminal justice system.

Furthermore, the defendants selected to receive the death penalty often receive inadequate counsel. Whether or not an individual is sentenced to the death penalty depends heavily on the competency of his or her legal team. This is noted as one of the defining factors of whether or not a death sentence is handed down. Few defendants can afford to hire a skilled lawyer, and are forced to rely on lawyers with heavy caseloads.

Finally, when there is much doubt surrounding a person's guilt or innocence, a death penalty sentence should never be handed down. We are reminded of the Troy Davis case, and the persistent doubt surrounding his guilt. Until his final breath, he maintained his innocence, and inspired millions around the world to act on his behalf. We cannot consciously sit by and allow this to continue. We reiterate our support for death penalty repeal in Connecticut, and hope that its repeal comes swiftly.