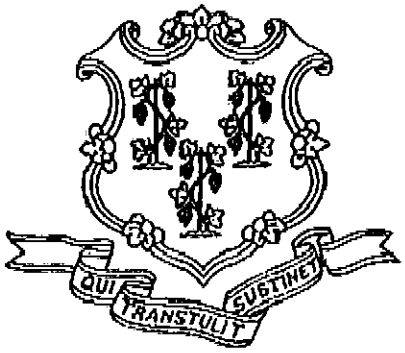

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Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

Monday, March 14th, 2011

11:00 AM in Room 2C of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission is an advocate for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis and advocacy. I am here today to speak in support of ***Senate Bill. (SB) 280*** – *An act revising the penalty for capital felonies.* The Commission supports this bill for a number of reasons.

Firstly African-Americans make up the vast majority of the incarcerated population at both the juvenile and adult levels of the criminal justice system. Roughly 44 percent of the children represented in detention centers in the state are African-American[1] and at least 42 percent of African-Americans make up the

[1] Connecticut Voices for the Children, Reforming Connecticut's Juvenile Justice System. *Racial and Ethnic Biases*

state's prison population.[2] The lifetime likelihood of incarceration for African Americans is 16.2 percent almost twice that of Hispanics at 9.4 percent and more than six times that of whites at 2.5 percent. Among men, African Americans have a 28.5 percent chance of incarceration over their lifetime, while Hispanics have a 16.2 percent chance and whites have a 4.4 percent chance.[3] Furthermore 98 percent of the Chief districts attorney's in state's like Connecticut that have a death penalty are white, Abundant research substantiates that race, class, cultural affiliation etc. are all factors that influence juror's decisions in serving justice. As we can see, the statistics are heavily stacked against African-Americans in all areas of criminal justice. We know that at least 5 of the inmates currently on death row are black.[4] We must emphasize that we support rehabilitation and treatment but not capital punishment.

Secondly there is no such thing as a perfect justice system. Since 1973, over 130 people in the nation have been released from death row with evidence of their innocence.[5] Here in Connecticut as recently as 2006 the case of James Tillman served as a wake up call. James Tillman served 16.5 years in prison before being exonerated by DNA testing on July 11th, 2006 for crimes it was learnt he didn't commit. How many more innocent souls are out there waiting to be executed?

Thirdly from a cost perspective it costs at least $40,000 annually to house an inmate in Connecticut's prison system.[6] Its difficult to ascertain the exact costs of housing death row inmates from point of incarceration to the execution chamber and beyond but most estimates rate capital punishment significantly higher than life imprisonment. Furthermore there is strong evidence that the death penalty reduces resources available for crime prevention, mental health treatment, education and rehabilitation, meaningful victims' services, and drug treatment

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[2] Connecticut Inmate Population by Race and Ethnicity
[3] Joint Center Databank, African-Americans, Crime and Criminal Justice
[4] Connecticut Office of Legislative Research, Connecticut Death Row Inmates
[5] Death Penalty Information Center, Facts About the Death Penalty
[6] Connecticut Office of Legislative Research, Costs of Death Row

programs. These are programs the state should be investing in instead of capital punishment or even incarceration.

In conclusion some of us will never know how we would react in the loss of a relative/loved ones as a result of homicide, or as the relative of the individual on death row. However what we can all agree on is that taking another person's life is never a pleasant experience.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.