

**Testimony at Public Hearing on the Death Penalty
SB No 280 An Act Revising the Penalty for Capital
Felonies**

March 14, 2012, Hartford, CT.

My name is Judy Meikle and I am grateful for this opportunity to testify today on behalf of New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) of the Religious Society of Friends regarding Senate Bill No 280. The NYYM is a gathering of Quaker meetings and worship groups in New York State, northern and central New Jersey, and **southwestern Connecticut.**

I am a member of Wilton Monthly Meeting, which is located in Wilton, Connecticut and I have also attended the worship group in Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York. I am an active facilitator of the Alternatives to Violence Project, an international violence prevention program which is well known both in prisons and in the community. As a Friend whose concerns for the criminal justice system run deep, I speak to you today on behalf of my Yearly Meeting about our beliefs and prayers concerning abolition of the death penalty.

Ours is a simple faith and a radical witness. Our guiding truth is that the Divine is in every person. From this belief flow our historic testimonies – our corporate witnesses to truth, which we live out in our every day activities as we “let our lives speak”. These core values of peace, simplicity, equality, community and integrity guide our decisions and form the foundation of all our endeavors.

Our position on the death penalty is set out in our book of **Faith and Practice** -

“We have consistently opposed capital punishment. We are clear that each person is uniquely valuable and divine, and none is totally beyond redemption. The death penalty rejects the message of forgiveness. In some cases, it legally destroys

innocent persons, and in all cases it degrades the humanity of the executioners and of the society that endorses the act.”

As Quakers, we place deep faith in love before fear and in the transforming power of peace. We recognize that murder is a terrible tragedy, wreaking havoc and pain on everyone that it touches. We therefore recognize that murder is simply wrong no matter who perpetrates it – whether an individual or the State.

The decision before the legislature is a weighty one. There will be many facts and opinions laid before you today. In January 2005, the presiding Clerk of NYYM stood before the State Assembly in Albany and reminded them that theirs was a moment in history. She asked them to think about the legacy that they were leaving future generations. She compared the antiquated and barbaric notion of justice that is capital punishment to slavery and child labor and Jim Crow – as practices once accepted by society but now deemed relics of a misguided past. She urged the legislature in Albany to seize the opportunity to abolish capital punishment in the State of New York.

And they did. Followed by the State of New Jersey in 2007, and the State of New Mexico in 2009, and the State of Illinois in 2011.

I stand before you today to fulfill a personal and religious obligation to urge **this** legislative body to seize **this** opportunity to be on the right side of history and abolish the death penalty in the State of Connecticut in 2012.

Thank you.

Judy Meikle, Darien, CT

On behalf of New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

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