

Mary L Sanders - Testimony for the Judiciary Committee - March 14, 2012
S.B.280 - An Act to Repeal the Death Penalty

I have always believed that killing of any kind is wrong. I am against war and believe that diplomacy and civilized negotiations can resolve most conflicts. I believe in a woman's right to choose but am morally against abortion. I believe in letting nature take its course when people are terminally ill, but am against euthanasia or assisted suicide. I am also against using death as a punishment no matter the crime. I personally believe that only God has the right to end life. How dare public officials decide whose life should be ended and whose should be saved? How can we justify using violence as a deterrent to violence? Besides how do you decide which cases are serious enough to warrant a capital punishment trial? Aren't all murders equally illegal and traumatic for the surviving family members?

Speaking of families; there are over 100 murder victims' families right here in CT asking you to repeal the death penalty. They do not want more blood spent; their loved ones will not be returned to them with the killing of the accused. Years and years of appeals and court dates only serve to prolong their suffering. They have stated repeatedly that a sentence of life in prison, with no chance of parole, would help them to get on with the healing. Shouldn't justice take into consideration what the victims want?

Even if you do not have moral issues with the Death Penalty what about the fact that the present system of capital punishment is racist and unjust. According to an article published in October of 2011 by Marc Morial, President of the National Urban League, "African Americans make up about 13% of the U.S. population; more than 42 percent of death row inmates are black. Over 75% of the murder victims in cases resulting in an execution were white, even though nationally only 50% of murder victims are white." The disparities in sentencing are disturbing but the fact that since 1973, a total of 138 men and women have been exonerated or had their death sentences commuted based on post-conviction findings that proved their innocence is even more alarming. According to the Innocence Project, a national litigation and public policy organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted people, "seventeen people have been proven innocent and exonerated by DNA testing in the U.S. after serving time on death row. They served 187 years on death row for crimes they did not commit". Some people did not get the chance to prove their innocence although their guilt may have been questioned. In one case there was evidence quite to the contrary.

On September 21st at 11:08 pm Troy Davis was administered a lethal injection that ended his life, at the age of 42. Accused of killing a white off-duty police officer in 1989, he maintained his innocence with his dying breath, as he had done for more than 20 years. No weapon was ever found, there was no physical evidence linking him to the crime and 7 of 9 witnesses had recanted their testimony. Anti-death penalty advocates here and around the world worked diligently in hopes of exoneration or further investigation to no avail. Troy Davis was even denied a polygraph test. The state of Georgia was relentless and took the chance of killing an innocent man just to close the books. The family of the murder victim will never know if they got the right man and another family is left to mourn. Many of our hearts were broken as we lost more and more faith in our criminal justice system around the nation. We have a lot of work to do right here on our flawed system; repealing the death penalty would be a bold statement that CT lawmakers want true and equitable justice.

Respectfully submitted:

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