

## **Testimony in Support of HB 2167, Abolishing the Death Penalty**

House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee Hearing  
February 13, 2017

Chairman Jennings and Members of the Committee:

I write to urge you to support HB 2167, which would repeal the death penalty and replace it with life in prison without parole. I come to this position as someone who lost a loved one to murder. This event caused deep pain and continues to have lasting impact on my family.

On May 17, 1984, a man walked into my sister Patricia Erikson's unlocked house in Colorado after her daughter had left for school. While Pat was still asleep, the intruder shot her twice. My sister's murder impacted my entire family. The murder was devastating for my mother, my siblings, and myself, and it permanently affected my niece, who was the one to discover her mother's dead body.

You never get over the murder of a loved one. But there are better and worse ways to respond to it. The more I have looked at how the death penalty works in reality, the more I became convinced that our system of capital punishment is broken and fails murder victims' families.

In my sister's case, a jury never handed down a death penalty – in fact, there was never even a trial. Though there was a suspect in the killing of my sister, no one was ever tried for the murder. As you can imagine, we were angry that no one was brought to justice for my sister's murder. We know our story is not unique. Each year, thousands of murders across the country go unsolved.

Given that many cases like my sister's go unsolved, I have a hard time understanding why Kansas and other states dedicate so much time and so many resources to keeping the death penalty. There have been thousands of murders in Kansas since it reinstated the death penalty in 1994. In just a handful of cases, prosecutors seek the death penalty, which means extra time, money, and resources for these cases, but for what purpose? Capital cases languish in the courts for years and some death sentences are overturned. Such uncertainty often leaves murder victims' families frustrated.

Kansas can do better than keeping in place its broken death penalty. Given that our state has a limited resources for law enforcement and public safety, we need to use these resources wisely and not on a costly and ineffective death penalty. Kansas would be better served focusing its attention and resources on helping the families of murder victims and investigating other unsolved murders.

Murder shakes families and the broader community, and it understandably challenges us on an issue such as capital punishment. The murder of my sister deeply challenged my views on the subject. I still reject the death penalty because I recognize that it fails to help families and communities in the aftermath of tragedy.

Kansas pours millions of dollars into its death penalty with few results. Now is the time to end this dysfunctional system, and I hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity.

Sincerely,

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