



Sisters of
Saint Joseph™
CHESTNUT HILL • PHILADELPHIA

June 11, 2015

The Honorable Ron Marsico.
Chair, House Judiciary Committee.
315J Main Capitol Building
PO Box 202105.
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2105

The Honorable Joseph R. Petrarca
Democratic Chair, House Judiciary Committee
220 Irvis Office Building
PO Box 202055
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2055

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Sister Colleen Dauerbach and I am a Sister of Saint Joseph from Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I serve in the Social Justice Ministry for our Congregation and I network with those who live and work in the State of Pennsylvania as well as with those working for Peace and Justice Nationally and Internationally. I am deeply honored to be invited to speak with you today from the moral stance that capital punishment is just plain wrong!

We, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, whose mission is one of unity and reconciliation, declare our opposition to the death penalty while reaching out in compassion to victims of violent crimes. We join our voices with our sisters and brothers from around the world who denounce the use of the death penalty as a deterrent for crime and who consider the death penalty as a violation of human rights. We took this Corporate Stand Against the Death Penalty on December 10, 1998 and with this stance I say capital punishment is just plain wrong!

Pope Francis has stated very clearly that justice can never be done by killing another human being and he stresses there can be no humane way of carrying out a death sentence. To Christians, he says, all life is sacred and every one of us is created by God, who does not want to punish one murderer with another, but rather wishes to see the murderer repent. Capital punishment signifies "a failure" that obligates the state to kill in the name of justice. We join our voices with our Holy Father and say that capital punishment is just plain wrong!

I have personally known a Sister of Saint Joseph who experienced the heinous murder of her own sister at the hands of her brother-in-law. Sister and her family endured many years of suffering but did not consider that seeking the death penalty would bring a just resolution to this great loss. Closure came when the trial ended with the sentence of life in prison without parole. Once again we restate the faith filled belief that capital punishment is just plain wrong!

I wish to conclude with my gratitude for this time to bring the corporate voice of our sisters to this hearing. I also want to recognize the beliefs of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg who said in a 2001 speech, "In the United States, the most daunting of those criminal matters currently are cases in which death may be the punishment. I have yet to see a death case, among the dozens coming to the Supreme Court on eve of execution petitions, in which the defendant was well represented at trial." And, just this month, former Justice John Paul Stevens noted, "The risk of error is larger in death cases than it is in other cases, and that certainly can't be right." The voices are growing stronger across our country and to this I say, capital punishment is just plain wrong!

Respectfully,
Sister Colleen Dauerbach, SSJ