

House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee
Hearing on HB 2167
February 13, 2017

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 2167

Dear Chairman Jennings and Committee Members:

I strongly support ending the death penalty, and hope that 2017 will finally be the year that Kansas does away with this failed policy. The murder of a close family member, my sister Helen Klassen, shapes my perspective on this issue. It is clear to me that the death penalty fails to help the family members of murder victims, and in many instances can inflict additional harm.

The murder of my sister left a deep emotional impact on my family and me. Helen was the victim of a brutal rape and murder over 40 years ago. It was Helen's grade school daughter who discovered her body after coming home from school. This tragedy shook our family and robbed from us our sense of safety. My sister's six brothers and sisters and their families struggled with how to cope and how best to help her daughters and husband deal with symptoms resembling posttraumatic stress disorder.

The individual who murdered my sister was never found. This senseless murder left us with many unanswered questions. As we struggled with these questions and anger, our family focused on healing. We recognized that, if the individual who murdered my sister ever were caught, the death penalty would not help us as we worked to rebuild our lives. Fortunately, we never had to endure a lengthy capital trial followed by years of appeals, which only would have inflicted more pain on our family.

I am hopeful that Kansas and others states can move beyond the death penalty and dedicate more attention and resources to policies that reduce violence and address the real needs of murder victims' families. It is by working toward ending the death penalty that my family and I honor my sister's memory.

Sincerely,

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