

**January 16, 2014 Statement
Abolition of the Death Penalty
Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann
Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas**

Chairman King and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding a hearing on this crucial issue. I am grateful for the opportunity to address your Committee on this important public policy matter. I support the abolition of the death penalty and encourage the Legislature to repeal the law authorizing its use in Kansas.

Governments have an obligation to protect the innocent from perpetrators of violence. We need to make certain that our criminal justice system denies violent criminals the opportunity to offend again and create new innocent victims. However, if we can protect the innocent with bloodless means, we should. And it is my belief that our society is able to protect itself without resort to capital punishment.

This is not a question of whether the perpetrator of a heinous crime deserves death. We do not live in a country that bases its criminal justice system on giving those who have brutally tortured and killed their victims "what they deserve," otherwise our methods of punishment -- and execution -- would be very different than what they are. Rather, this is a question of what is best for our society. It is a question of what kind of people we want to be, even when faced with the darkest evil.


Opponents and proponents of the death penalty continue to debate whether or not capital punishment is an effective deterrent to violent crimes. What is not debatable is the finality of the death penalty. We cannot reverse an execution when it is discovered through forensic science that the person judged guilty was actually innocent. Even if such mistakes are extremely rare, the possibility of executing an innocent man is so awful that the risk should not be borne.

For those of us who are Christians we must remember that Jesus Christ gave his life on Calvary because He desired that every human being be transformed by the mercy of God that was unleashed from His cross. He forgave the repentant criminal, who was crucified alongside Him, and He prayed for the forgiveness of his own executioners. Abolishing the death penalty affords violent criminals more time to repent and experience divine mercy. Moreover, Jesus is the prime example of an innocent person who was the victim of the death penalty.

Let me conclude by saying that it is imperative that we provide the families of victims with all of the support and assistance we can as they attempt to cope with the unimaginable pain of losing a loved one to violent crime. My own Father was murdered in 1948 when my Mother was pregnant with me. Our family knows the pain of losing a loved one as a result of a violent crime. We know the anguish that families suffer, not just at the time of such a senseless tragedy, but the painful absence of the loving presence of a husband, a father, a brother and dear friend during the ensuing years and decades.

Opposition to the death penalty in no way should be construed as a lack of sympathy for the victims and their families, or a lack of awareness of how evil these crimes are. I offer my prayers for all people who have had to endure the horror of a murder of a family member or friend. The Catholic community wants to be of service and support to families (regardless of their Faith) who have lost a loved one as a result of criminal violence.

Thank you for considering my testimony. Be assured of my prayers for wisdom for you and your fellow legislators as you deliberate on this life and death issue.



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