

## HEARING ON HB 2282 TO REPEAL THE DEATH PENALTY

House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee (Chairman Rep. J. Russell Jennings)

February 17, 2019

Testimony in Support of HB 2282 Submitted by Dr. Michael Birzer

My name is Michael Birzer and I am a Professor of Criminal Justice at Wichita State University. I write to you today as a proponent of HB 2282 which calls for the repeal of the death penalty.

As a criminologist, I am familiar with the research illuminating the many problems capital punishment presents. Many years of research inform us that the death penalty is not a deterrent to crime. Likewise, many studies shed light on the host of problems centering on the death penalty. In part, these problems center on the substantial cost of the death penalty, disparities in who gets sentenced to death, and the possibility of an innocent person being sentenced and put to death. Polls also reveal that public support of the death penalty has been waning in recent years.

Please do not construe my written testimony as advocating for a soft approach on crime for those convicted of heinous crimes. I have been an academic for 19 years now, however, prior to entry into teaching and research I served 18 years with the Sedgwick County Sheriff's Department in Wichita. During my law enforcement career, I saw firsthand the devastating effects of crime and disorder. I saw the victims of crime who had been beaten, brutalized and murdered. I dealt with the most hardened criminals. Moreover, there is not a day that goes by that I do not think about four fellow officers that I worked with, and who were killed in the line of duty. My law enforcement experience along with my academic training has given me a unique view of crime, criminals, and the criminal justice system.

After 18 years of service as a law enforcement officer, and the past 19 years as an academic studying crime and criminal justice, I have concluded that the death penalty is not a meaningful solution to crime. There is simply too much evidence suggesting that it has too many complex problems.

Repealing the death penalty in Kansas would potentially save a significant amount of taxpayer dollars. Perhaps the money saved could be used to invest in promising criminal justice practices aimed at reducing recidivism and enhancing crime-fighting resources for the law enforcement community.

Sincerely,

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