

**February 15, 2024**  
**House Bill 2782**  
**Testimony of Lara Giordano**  
**Opponent**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lara Giordano. I am the Program & Engagement Director at the Lawrence Jewish Community Congregation (the LJCC). The LJCC is a lay-led, non-denominational synagogue located in Lawrence, Kansas. Composed of approximately 90 member households, we are the only egalitarian synagogue in all of Douglas County.

I write to you today as a Jewish-American to express my opposition to HB 2782, a bill before this Committee that would allow for the use of lethal gas in the imposition of the death penalty in Kansas.

HB 2872 allows for execution by “hypoxia” and troublingly tells us nothing about how that kind of sentence could be carried out. However, the Attorney General has proposed this bill on the heels of Alabama’s execution of Kenny Smith with nitrogen gas. Mr. Smith was strapped to a gurney, fitted with a mask, and while convulsing and retching, was forced to breathe the substance that would kill him. It is in light of this reality and recent event that we must examine HB 2782.

A bloodless form of killing might appear, on the face of it, to be humane – to somehow conform to the standards of being neither cruel nor unusual, but we know that this is not the case. We know this from the death of Kenny Smith – and the deaths of many others at the hands of the state. While this knowledge is open to all, it is an unfortunate consequence of history that, for Jewish people, such knowledge is unavoidable.

At a young age, most Americans learn of the Third Reich’s atrocities with lethal gas. We hear the accounts of concentration camp prisoners being stripped of their clothes and belongings and sent to a large room disguised as a shower chamber. Lethal gas poured in, and hundreds died at a time. For most Americans, this is the ultimate representation of state-sponsored killing. For Jews, there is an especially deep and sorrowful connection. Approximately 2.7 million Jews died from gassings at these killing centers.

Now, I watch as Kansas, a place where I have lived nine years, discusses bringing back a version of the gas chamber. I urge the Kansas legislature to reject this bill - to reject state-sponsored killing by gas and the painful Jewish history that it reanimates.

Ultimately, the pain of HB 2782 is just a function of the underlying fallacy of capital punishment. Whether by gas or any other means, our collective humanity suffers when we take life rather than give. State-sponsored killing is a wound unto us all.

A common saying in our faith community, which can be traced to our earliest days, is “L’Chaim,” which is a celebration of life and health. Literally translated, it means “To life!,” and that is where

I urge this Committee today. Reject HB 2782 because we share a collective appreciation for life. Life is the ultimate triumph over death. We show courage, not weakness, when we give it. Let us rise above hate and vengeance and show that courage together. L'Chaim, Kansas.

With hope,

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