

**Written Testimony**

**Kansas State Legislature**

**Topeka, Kansas**

**March 15, 2012**

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My name is Michael Birzer and I am a Professor of Criminal Justice and Director of the School of Community Affairs at Wichita State University. I write today as a proponent for the abolition of Capital Punishment in the State of Kansas.

As a criminologist, I am familiar with the voluminous literature that that sheds light on the host of problems that capital punishment presents. These problems center on the vast empirical evidence that the death penalty is not a deterrent to crime, disparities in who gets sentenced to death, the substantial cost of the death penalty, and the possibility of an innocent person being sentenced and put to death.

Please do not construe my written testimony today as advocating for a soft approach on crime for those convicted of the most heinous crimes. I have been an academic for 12 years now, however, prior to entry into teaching and research I served over 18 years with the Sedgwick County Sheriff's Department in Wichita. During my 18 year law enforcement career I saw firsthand the devastating effects of crime. I saw the victims of crime who had been beaten, brutalized and murdered, and I saw the evil that human beings could inflict upon each other. I saw and dealt with the most hardened criminals. And, there is not a day that goes by that I don't think about four fellow officers that I worked with, and 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 over 12 years as an academic studying crime and criminal justice, I have come to the conclusion that the death penalty is not a meaningful solution to crime. There is simply too much evidence suggesting that it has too many problems, no matter how perfect we perceive our criminal justice system to be.

Abolishing the death penalty in Kansas would potentially save an astronomical amount of money. Perhaps the money saved could be used to enhance the security of our state prison system while at the same time providing added security for the men and women who serve as correctional officers. Moreover, perhaps the money saved could be used to invest in promising criminal justice practices and programs aimed at reducing recidivism and enhancing crime fighting resources, which over time, could result in tremendous cost savings.

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