

Testifying against the death penalty in Missouri

Mary Ann McGivern | Oct. 16, 2012 NCR Today

This week, I'm delivering testimony at a legislative hearing about revision of the criminal code. There are a lot of points to be made.

Should benefits such as reduced disparity between crack and powder cocaine possession penalties be made retroactive? Can expungement of a drug possession felony be expanded to expungement of a cluster of drug possession felonies? Can the years of incarceration actually be reduced? If they are reduced, can the state reserve some of the cash savings for programs for the released prisoners so they don't re-offend?

I've been writing testimony for two weeks, and the one that is still waiting for me is opposition to the death penalty. Missouri strictly regulates abortion. Business owners were granted the right in the last session to refuse to provide insurance for abortion or contraception if they were opposed in conscience.

But this pro-life legislature favors the death penalty. No seamless garment there.

Missouri is third in executions behind Texas and Florida. We're pretty far behind, not hard on their heels. But it is not a position to be proud of. Forty-six men are on death row right now. The number has built up because of Supreme Court cases and the unavailability of the drugs used for executions. Between 1989 and 2011, Missouri executed 68 men.

The only sentence I have so far in my testimony is that the death penalty is the pre-eminent life issue because execution is an action of the state, an action supported and maintained by all of us, whether we will it or not. Say a prayer, please, that I find the words.

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