

ASK YOUR SENATOR TO SUPPORT SB1911

Dear Senator _____,

I am writing to you as your constituent to express my deep concerns regarding the fairness and accuracy of Tennessee's death penalty system. Regardless of your feelings regarding the morality of capital punishment, I think that we can all agree that the death penalty should be applied justly. I am deeply concerned that our current system fails to meet this standard.

Across the country, more than 120 inmates have been exonerated and released from death row after proof of their innocence came to light. Here in Tennessee, Paul Gregory House is still sitting on our death row despite a decision by the United States Supreme Court that no jury in the country would find him guilty if they were presented with all the evidence. This ruling was made in June of last year, but Paul House is still on death row. If our system can make such clear and grievous mistakes, how are we expected to trust it to mete out justice in life and death situations?

The problems in Tennessee's capital punishment system are extremely widespread. Nearly all of the inmates on Tennessee's death row are indigent, and people of color and people suffering from mental illness are greatly over-represented. In addition, the death penalty has repeatedly been shown to cost far more than a system which imposes life without parole as it's harshest punishment. I do not want my tax dollars to be spent on a system which cannot even guarantee that the innocent will not be sentenced to death along with the guilty.

Senator _____, Tennesseans believe in justice, but justice should be blind to economic status or race. Justice should not sentence the innocent along with the guilty. Our current death penalty system does not meet these standards. I am writing to you to ask that you act to ensure that Tennessee's death penalty system is truly fair and accurate by supporting legislation introduced by Senator Jackson (SB1911) to create a commission to conduct a complete study of Tennessee's death penalty system.

Thank you for your work advocating for the people of our area. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request.

Yours truly,

**IF YOUR REPRESENTATIVE IS A REPUBLICAN, ASK FOR SUPPORT OF
HB2162**

Dear Representative _____,

I am writing to you as your constituent to express my deep concerns regarding the fairness and accuracy of Tennessee's death penalty system. Regardless of your feelings regarding the morality of capital punishment, I think that we can all agree that the death penalty should be applied justly. I am deeply concerned that our current system fails to meet this standard.

Across the country, more than 120 inmates have been exonerated and released from death row after proof of their innocence came to light. Here in Tennessee, Paul Gregory House is still sitting on our death row despite a decision by the United States Supreme Court that no jury in the country would find him guilty if they were presented with all the evidence. This ruling was made in June of last year, but Paul House is still on death row. If our system can make such clear and grievous mistakes, how are we expected to trust it to mete out justice in life and death situations?

The problems in Tennessee's capital punishment system are extremely widespread. Nearly all of the inmates on Tennessee's death row are indigent, and people of color and people suffering from mental illness are greatly over-represented. In addition, the death penalty has repeatedly been shown to cost far more than a system which imposes life without parole as it's harshest punishment. I do not want my tax dollars to be spent on a system which cannot even guarantee that the innocent will not be sentenced to death along with the guilty.

Representative _____, Tennesseans believe in justice, but justice should be blind to economic status or race. Justice should not sentence the innocent along with the guilty. Our current death penalty system does not meet these standards. I am writing to you to ask that you act to ensure that Tennessee's death penalty system is truly fair and accurate by supporting legislation introduced by Representative Briley (HB2162) to create a commission to conduct a complete study of Tennessee's death penalty system.

Thank you for your work advocating for the people of our area. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request.

Yours truly,

IF YOUR REPRESENTATIVE IS A DEMOCRAT, ASK FOR SUPPORT OF BOTH HB2162 AND HB 1357

Dear Representative _____,

I am writing to you today to express my deep concerns with Tennessee's death penalty system. When Governor Bredesen halted executions last month, he referred to our execution protocols as "sloppy." But our entire capital punishment system is worse than sloppy, it is broken. Sentences are not handed out uniformly, and we cannot even be sure that innocent people will not be sentenced to death. Regardless of a person's feelings regarding the morality of capital punishment, we can all agree that we cannot afford sloppiness in matter of life and death.

Tennessee's death penalty system is riddled with error. Nearly every one of the 102 people currently awaiting execution is indigent. Moreover, people suffering from mental illness and people of color are vastly over-represented on Tennessee's death row. If we are going to have a death penalty, sentences should be handed out without regard to economic status or race, but that does not appear to be the case in Tennessee.

Perhaps even more frighteningly, our system cannot even guarantee that innocent people will not be sentenced to death. Today, Paul Gregory House sits on Tennessee's death row, despite the fact that in June of last year, the United States Supreme Court ruled that no reasonable juror would find him guilty if presented with all the evidence. Paul House has been sitting on death row for over twenty years. How can we trust a system that cannot even guarantee that the innocent will not be sentenced to death?

Representative _____, I do not want my tax dollars to pay for a system that does not meet our society's standard of justice. I am afraid that our state is in serious risk of executing innocent people. I am writing to ask that you, as my voice in state government, act to guarantee that our capital punishment system functions fairly and accurately by supporting legislation (HB 1357 introduced by Representative Turner) to extend the Governor's moratorium and (HB2162 introduced by Representative Briley) to create a commission to conduct a complete study of our death penalty system.

Thank you for your dedicated service to the people of our area. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this important issue.

Sincerely yours,

March 1, 2007

Governor's Office
Tennessee State Capitol
Nashville, TN 37243-0001

Dear Governor Bredeesen:

I would like to thank you for your courageous decision to issue a 90-day moratorium on executions in Tennessee in order to ensure that all executions are carried out in a humane manner. I am deeply grateful for your moral leadership. However, our state's sloppy lethal injection procedures are only the beginning of the problems with our death penalty system in Tennessee.

The death penalty spends far more of our tax dollars than life without parole, and no research demonstrates that the death penalty has any deterrent value. The death penalty is racially biased with 25% of African-Americans on Tennessee's death row sentenced by all white juries. Furthermore, nearly all of the 102 inmates on Tennessee's death row are indigent, revealing a deep economic bias.

Even more disturbing, 123 people nationwide have been released from death row after they were determined to be innocent of the crime for which they were convicted and sentenced to death. Currently, Paul House, a Tennessee death row inmate who, in 2006 the U.S. Supreme Court stated that no reasonable juror would ever convict given new evidence in his case, continues to languish on death row for a crime that he did not commit. I urge you to right this egregious wrong, and grant Paul House a full pardon.

Furthermore, I also ask that you extend the current moratorium while the state conducts a full study of the death penalty system in Tennessee. With such grievous problems, the state should not be carrying out any death sentences without a complete study. Governor, please continue to demonstrate the moral courage you have already displayed by pardoning Paul House and extending the current moratorium. Lives depend on your decision.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Ron Ramsey
1 Legislative Plaza
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Senator Ramsey,

Congratulations on being elected Lieutenant Governor. In that regard, I am writing to you about my deep concerns with the fairness and accuracy of Tennessee's death penalty system. Regardless of a person's beliefs regarding the morality of the death penalty, we can all agree that our system should be fair and accurate. I am deeply concerned that our current capital punishment system fails to meet these standards and that Tennessee runs the tragic risk of executing an innocent person.

Since 1973, more than 120 people across the country have been exonerated and released from death row after evidence of their innocence came to light. This is roughly one exoneration for every nine executions in the same time period, and that is a frightening number to me. Here in Tennessee, Paul Gregory House sits on death row despite the ruling, by the United States Supreme Court in June of last year, that no reasonable jury would convict House if presented with all the evidence in his case. How can we trust a system that cannot even guarantee that the innocent will not be sentenced along with the guilty?

When Governor Bredesen halted executions last month, he described Tennessee's execution protocols as "sloppy," but in fact our entire system is sloppy and riddled with error. Tennesseans deserve a system that we can trust, and our current death penalty does not meet that standard. I am writing to you to ask that you stand up for fairness and justice by supporting Senator Jackson's bill (SB1911) to create a commission to conduct a complete study of our death penalty system. Please work to move this bill through the Senate to guarantee that Tennesseans have a death penalty system that is reliable.

Thank you for your work to better our state. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request.

Yours truly,

The Honorable Mae Beavers
308 War Memorial Building
Nashville, TN 37243-0217

Dear Senator Beavers,

Congratulations on being named the Chair of the Judiciary Committee. In that regard, I am writing to you about my deep concerns with the fairness and accuracy of Tennessee's death penalty system. Regardless of a person's beliefs regarding the morality of the death penalty, we can all agree that our system should be fair and accurate. I am deeply concerned that our current capital punishment system fails to meet these standards and that Tennessee runs the tragic risk of executing an innocent person.

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Thank you for your work to better our state. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request.

Yours truly,

Dear Commissioner

I am writing to you as a your constituent to express my concerns regarding Tennessee's capital punishment system. Today, our death penalty system is broken. It cannot guarantee the fairness and accuracy that Tennesseans deserve in a system making life and death decisions.

Tennessee's death penalty is being unfairly applied along economic, racial, and geographic lines. Nearly all of the 102 people currently sentenced to death are indigent. Roughly two in five come from our county alone. African-Americans are vastly over-represented, and one quarter of the people of color on Tennessee's death row were sentenced by all white juries. This includes two black men sentenced before all white juries here in Memphis, where half of our population is African-American. Clearly, this should be of serious concern to anyone who cares about justice and fairness.

Moreover, our system cannot even guarantee that innocent people will not be sentenced to death along with the guilty. Erskine Johnson, one of the African-American men tried by an all white jury mentioned previously, had never been to Tennessee before he was brought here for his trial. His death sentence has been overturned, but he is still fighting to prove his innocence. Paul Gregory House is sitting on Tennessee's death row today, despite the United State Supreme Court's ruling, in June of last year, that no reasonable jury would convict House if all the evidence was presented. How can we trust a system that cannot even guarantee that the innocent will not be convicted?

The death penalty in Tennessee is meted out unfairly along racial, economic, and geographic lines, and sometimes threatens the innocent along with the guilty. Moreover, our county pays for the extra costs of death penalty trials with funds that could go into our public schools or better training and equipment for our police officers on the streets. I do not want my tax dollars to support a system that cannot be trusted.

I am writing to you to ask that you support a resolution from the County Commission calling on the state legislature to enact a moratorium on executions while a full study of the death penalty is conducted to guarantee that our system functions justly. Over 150 municipalities across the county, including Nashville/Davidson here in Tennessee, have already taken this step. Regardless of a person's position on the morality of the death penalty, we can all agree that the executing someone because of their race, poverty, or someone who was actually innocent, would be an irreversible tragedy. I ask that you act to ensure that our state avoids this.

Thank you for your concern and your work on behalf of the people of Shelby County. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this issue.

Yours truly,

Dear Councilmember _____,

I am writing to you as a your constituent to express my concerns regarding Tennessee's capital punishment system. Today, our death penalty system is broken. It cannot guarantee the fairness and accuracy that Tennesseans deserve in a system making life and death decisions.

Tennessee's death penalty is being unfairly applied along economic and racial lines. Nearly all of the 102 people currently sentenced to death are indigent. African-Americans are vastly over-represented, and one quarter of the people of color on Tennessee's death row were sentenced by all white juries. This includes a black man sentenced before an all white juries here in Jackson, where one third of our population is African-American. Clearly, this should be of serious concern to anyone who cares about justice and fairness.

Moreover, our system cannot even guarantee that innocent people will not be sentenced to death along with the guilty. Paul Gregory House is sitting on Tennessee's death row today, despite the United State Supreme Court's ruling, in June of last year, that no reasonable jury would convict House if all the evidence was presented. How can we trust a system that cannot even guarantee that the innocent will not be convicted?

The death penalty in Tennessee is meted out unfairly along racial and economic lines, and sometimes threatens the innocent along with the guilty. Moreover, our county pays for the extra costs of death penalty trials with funds that could go into our public schools or better training and equipment for out police officers on the streets. I do not want my tax dollars to support a system that cannot be trusted.

I am writing to you to ask that you support a resolution from the City Council calling on the state legislature to enact a moratorium on executions while a full study of the death penalty is conducted to guarantee that our system functions justly. Over 150 municipalities across the county, including Nashville/Davidson here in Tennessee, have already taken this step. Regardless of a person's position on the morality of the death penalty, we can all agree that the executing someone because of their race, poverty, or someone who was actually innocent, would be an irreversible tragedy. I ask that you act to ensure that our state avoids this.

Thank you for your concern and your work on behalf of the people of Shelby County. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this issue.

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