

Testimony of
The Reverend Dr. Brady J. Vardemann
on Behalf of
The Montana Association of Churches

SB 306:

*An Act Abolishing the Death Penalty and
Replacing It with Life Imprisonment without
Possibility of Release*

Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
07 February 2007

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Testimony of The Reverend Dr. Brady Vardemann

Executive Director, Montana Association of Churches

Senator Laslovich and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is the Reverend Brady Vardemann, and I am here today to speak on behalf of the Montana Association of Churches with regard to MAC's long held and emphatic position on the issue of capital punishment.

For those of you who may not be familiar with the Montana Association of Churches, I would invite your exploration of this ecumenical organization [that is] comprised of 10 denominational judicatories representing several hundred mainline Christian churches in Montana and the many thousands of faith-filled people who are members of those congregations.

The people of MAC understand that a major responsibility of our role as followers of Christ is to be about doing our part to help establish peace in the world. We believe in the sanctity of life and the oneness of all humanity that God envisions for us. We believe that all persons carry within themselves a measure of the light of God.

In a world torn by violence and discord, MAC seeks to be a healing presence in our communities by creating safe places for civil dialogue and mutual respect in public discourse.

Through its various advocacy initiatives, MAC seeks to bring the message of the Gospel to those places where peace and justice are absent by speaking up for those among us who have been denied a voice and by working for the rights and dignity of all people.

For over 25 years, the Montana Association of Churches has declared its strong opposition to state sanctioned killing and has called upon our Governor and our elected representatives to abolish the death penalty in this state.

MAC objects to the state sanctioned killing of human beings for a number of reasons (some of which already have been heard here today).

It does not remove the causes of misery and suffering in our society.

It does not reduce the incidence of homicide in our communities.

Over and over again, we have seen how it has been applied unfairly across the spectrum of geography, race and economics.

It is far more expensive than the sentence of life without the possibility of release.

It tends to produce the very brutality which it seeks to prevent, even as it creates ever more victims: the families and loved ones of those who have committed murder.

It undermines the opportunity for murder victims' families and loved ones to move through the necessary stages of grief in a way that opens the door to forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.

It diminishes and degrades the humanity of all persons involved in carrying out the sentence of death, even as it leads to a gradual execution of the soul.

It denies a condemned person the opportunity for reconciliation and restoration of relationship – and for the life-transforming possibility for redemption, which we hold to be ultimately the work of Almighty God – *not* the appropriate function of the state.

And we must never forget that execution bears the awful and irrevocable possibility that an innocent person may be condemned to death.

The Montana Association of Churches urges your support and passage of SB 306. Thank you.