

Hello my name is Linda Wetzel and I am here in support of SB 236 to abolish the death penalty and replace it with a sentence of life without parole. I am not here because I want to save the life of anyone on death row.

In fact when I first heard about the murders of Thomas Running Rabbit and Harvey Mad Man, I was devastated. These two nice young men with promising futures had their lives unjustly taken away from them. These young men whom I taught and knew for 8 years at school were kind and decent people. Thomas left behind three small children to grow up without knowing him or his warm, bright smile.

After their murderer bragged of shooting Thomas and Harvey just for kicks I was sickened! Later he said he would choose to die rather than spend his life in jail.

I wanted their murderer dead, and was happy he was sentenced to death. Never realizing the process would last so many years. Never realizing it would hurt the families far more than the perpetrator.

Little did I know what their poor families were in for. Jessica Running Rabbit was four years old when her father was murdered. My son was best man in *her wedding* and her father's killer had yet to be executed after nearly 27 years. The killer has only known life, while the victims are still dead and while his rights to appeal have been a lifetime of suffering for the families and friends still waiting for justice. Had I known that life without parole would have been more humane than subjecting the loved ones to this never ending heartache, I would have reconsidered my support for the death penalty.

Meanwhile the press talks about the murderer. He is in the news all the time and everyone in Montana knows who he is. I refuse to say his name because he's all people talk about. How about Thomas Running Rabbit and Harvey Mad Man? They were the victims here, and their names are rarely heard.

Jessica and her brothers (4yrs, 3 yrs, and the baby was only a few months old) have grown up with the constant replaying of the gruesome crime in the news every time the killer goes to court. With each appeal and with each new court date, the killer and the crime are the topic of conversation and not the families left behind. Not Thomas Running Rabbit or Harvey Mad Man.

Some in Jessica's family wanted the death penalty and some were not sure but they all want this to end. All of them suffer because it never ends. Both mothers have died before justice has been served.

Who are we as a society when we speak more about the killer than the victims? If a killer is sentenced to life without parole it is over. He does not get widespread coverage of an appeal. His appeal process is short and simple and does not get the attention death cases get.

We need to help victims. We need to get rid of the death penalty and replace it with life without parole and make the "celebrity defendant" just a nobody who spends the rest of his life in a cell with nobody paying attention to him. That is how it should be. Please vote to end the death penalty.