

*Hello my name is Sandy Heaton and I thank you for this opportunity to be heard.*

*I am a mental health therapist who began working at Montana State Prison in 1973 and worked there for 30 years retiring in 2003. When I first started working at the prison as a young woman in my 30's I didn't have an opinion one way or the other about the death penalty. I can tell you I never thought I would be sitting before you today asking you to repeal the death penalty.*

*But over the years I saw what happened to staff and others at the prison when executions take place. I have come to the conclusion that executions have a harmful effect on corrections and others who work in the prison system.*

*Initially it was surprising to me at the effect it had on staff. As you might imagine, it takes a lot of planning and work ahead of time to have an execution go off without a hitch. As a result staff starts to be effected days and weeks before the event and sometimes was still affected days and weeks afterwards.*

*Everyone who works in a prison is affected when an execution takes place. It is an enormously stressful job to participate in an execution and to work at a place where an execution takes place. I have seen staff quit, as an execution got close because they felt they couldn't work for an agency that killed people. Other staff called off sick or just weren't around on the day of the execution. Tension among staff was much higher as people picked sides, each trying to convince the other that their viewpoint was right. It has been my experience that it takes several days or weeks for everyone to settle down again.*

*The funny thing is that it is very difficult for staff to support each other in this incredibly hard situation. In order to protect the execution team, the identity of its members is kept secret. This is a very confusing and conflicting message to send to those who are asked to end the life of a human being. The law tells you it's your job to carry out this sentence but we will protect you in this horrible job by not letting your friends and colleagues know that you are one of the ones who did the job. This sets up a scenario where the ones who do the killing can't rely on their colleagues to help them process it afterwards.*

*Another part to the picture are the staff members who have gotten to know these offenders as people and now have to stand by as they are killed. The irony for people working in the field is that they begin to see offenders as people, granted people who have done heinous things, but people nonetheless. They converse and interact with them on a daily basis. It is actually part of their job to protect them from harm. Executions take a long time to happen so no matter what, there are corrections officers in the jail who have a relationship with the person to be killed and they are affected.*

*I know that some of you may think that we need to have a death penalty to get rid of the prisoners who kill in jail. The only thing I can say to that is that I know how long it takes for an execution to happen. When someone is sentenced to death they are not executed for decades. So the death penalty really fails to address that problem and as I have said here creates so many more.*

*I also want to point your attention to three of my colleagues who have submitted written testimony: Dan Oberweiser, Bob Wallace, and Jon Salmonson, all of whom have spent years working in corrections and Montana State Prison.*