

Statement by Margaret Hawthorn

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As a murder victim's family member, I strongly support abolition of the death penalty in New Hampshire. Citing concern for victims' family members, Governor Sununu has threatened to veto (name of the bill), should it reach his desk.

In April, 2010 our daughter Molly MacDougall, then 31, was shot in the face in Henniker, NH by a young man who took a fancy to her the moment he met her. When she declined his advances, he made a lethal response, just four days after first laying eyes on her. Molly was happily married and living with her husband in a house on his family's farm. Two weeks from graduating from New Hampshire Technological Institute's nursing program, she hoped to become an operating room nurse. New Hampshire lost a good and responsible citizen that day. Our family lost a precious light in our lives.



From childhood, I had opposed the death penalty, even as I grew up in a family that supported it. Nonetheless, I had sometimes thought "easy for me to espouse non-violence when I haven't been put directly to the test." The question "what if it were your loved one?" hung in the air. Now it *was* my loved one.

The man convicted of her murder is serving a 40-to-life sentence. While the original charge was first degree murder, the case did not qualify as capital. This came as a relief; we had enough trauma without the specter of a second death connected to our loss.

The criminal justice system served our family to the best of its ability, but nearly eight years later it doesn't come close to eliminating the pain over our daughter's death. I wouldn't want to endure the prolonged ordeal of appeals, publicity, etc, only to discover for myself that an execution seldom - if ever - brings the peace of mind family members anticipate. As another victim's family member describes it, "Healing is a process, not an event."

Proponents of the death penalty often cite the feelings of victims' family members, as Governor Sununu has. For me, the best possible outcome would be to see the man who killed my daughter make a positive contribution with the life he is now to live in prison. To see him do something constructive would be to give me back a tiny piece of the goodness that lived in my daughter. There is no promise this will happen, but an execution would guarantee it couldn't.

Here are three points to consider when taking victims' loved ones into account:

- The death penalty is potentially divisive among victims' families as one crime is deemed more heinous than another, or one life is valued above another in the state's decisions about which cases to prosecute as capital.

- A 2012 Marquette University Law School study reported that victims' loved ones had improved physical and psychological health and greater satisfaction with the legal system in cases where perpetrators received life sentences, rather than death sentences.
- Lula Redmond, a Florida therapist who works with family members of murder victims, has said, "More often than not, families of murder victims do not experience the relief they expected to feel at the execution. Taking a life doesn't fill that void, but it's generally not until after the execution that families realize this."

I urge Governor Sununu not to veto abolition in my family's name.

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