



**Rocky Mountain Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
 God's work. Our hands.

January 30, 2017

Colorado Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: Senate Bill 17-095 – Senator Lucía Guzmán and Representative Alec Garnett

Dear Committee Members,

I write today to add my voice to the multitude of faith leaders asking for an end to the death penalty in Colorado, and to request your support for Senate Bill 95. I am one of 65 Bishops in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a denomination with nearly 4 million members and 10,000 congregations nationwide, including over 100 all across Colorado. Our church has long been opposed to capital punishment, and in 1991, our membership adopted a formal Social Statement on the Death Penalty. It reads, in part: *“Executions harm society by mirroring and reinforcing existing injustice. The death penalty distracts us from our work toward a just society. It deforms our response to violence at the individual, familial, institutional, and systemic levels. It perpetuates cycles of violence.”*

We as a faith community are committed to serving as God’s agents of restoration within society and to the principle of restorative justice. We feel strongly that executions do not restore broken society and can actually work counter to restoration. We recognize the need to protect society from those who endanger others. Our challenge is to incapacitate offenders in a manner that limits violence, but holds open the possibility of conversion and restoration. Part of the work of restoration is to address the hurt of each person whose life has been touched by violent crime. It is our contention that executions – which focus more on the offender and a spirit of vengeance and retribution – do little to address the actual pain of the victim’s family or those impacted by violent crime.

I am unable to be with you on February 15 for the hearing as I am on a trip to our companion church in Madagascar. For 10 years I served as a missionary in Madagascar, a country that abolished its death penalty statute. According to Amnesty International, over 100 of the world’s countries refrain from executing criminals, a list which has doubled in the past 25 years. We would be well-served to join the diverse community of nations that have already abolished capital punishment.

We acknowledge that the death penalty is a difficult issue with which you as legislators must wrestle. Yet compelled by our faith and inspired by the example of Jesus himself, we join the many other voices in asking you to repeal the death penalty in Colorado – for the sake of what is morally right, and as a matter of justice for all.

I have included links to the ELCA Social Statement on the Death Penalty as well as information on the use of the death penalty throughout the world for your reference. Thank you for reading this letter. Please feel invited to contact me if you have any questions or wish to discuss the matter further. I may be reached at [jgonia@rmselca.org](mailto:jgonia@rmselca.org) or at the address below.

Yours in faith,

Bishop James Gonia  
 Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA

[elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Death-Penalty](http://elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Death-Penalty)

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Use\\_of\\_capital\\_punishment\\_by\\_country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Use_of_capital_punishment_by_country)

**Christ's Church – Better Together**

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*a Reconciling in Christ synod*