

Paul Hildwin
Testimony in Opposition to HB 1749, HB 1413, HB 1737
in the House Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee
January 14, 2025

Good afternoon. My name is Paul Hildwin and I am a freed death row inmate from the state of Florida.

I am here today to explain why you should not reintroduce the death penalty. I was wrongfully convicted in 1985 of first degree murder which I did not commit. Because of bad representation of my court appointed attorney, an overzealous prosecutor who hid and withheld evidence that showed my innocence, and an FBI analyst who lied on the stand, I was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death.

In 1999, I contacted the Innocence Project and they took my case. In 2003, the DNA testing excluded me as the source of DNA found at the crime scene but the State still fought the results. We fought prosecutors for seven years to submit the DNA profile into the CODIS DNA database to determine the source. In 2010, the Florida Supreme Court finally ordered them to run the DNA through the database and it showed the DNA matched the victim's boyfriend. And in 2014, the Florida Supreme Court overturned my conviction.

Altogether, I spent 35 years wrongfully incarcerated – 29 years spent on death row and six years in the county jail waiting for my release. I lost everything. I lost my freedom. I went in when I was 24 years old and healthy and I came out at 60 years old and very ill. I was first diagnosed with cancer in 2006 and am now a five-time cancer survivor. I lost my family, all because of a wrongful conviction.

In 1990 I was scheduled for execution but by the grace of God, I am still here. While I was on death row, I met other innocent people who were also eventually exonerated. They walked out of prison before I did but in March 2020 I was finally free.

I urge you not to reinstate the death penalty because the fact of the matter is, innocent people are arrested. Innocent people are wrongfully convicted of crimes they did not commit. And innocent people are sentenced to death. There are innocent people on death row. I know because I was one of them.

Thank you for your time. I am available if you have any questions.