

MV FHR
Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights

January 22, 2010

Dear Washington lawmaker:

I am writing to you as a legislative colleague from New Hampshire and as Executive Director of a national victims' organization to urge you to support legislation that replaces the death penalty with lifetime incarceration.

I am aware that Washington state has recently witnessed the appalling murders of law enforcement officers by three separate assailants. While two of the offenders were killed before they could be arrested, it appears from news reports that some or all of the offenders were severely mentally ill. While not all people with mental illness commit murders, these events demonstrate that failing to provide adequate mental health treatment to people in our communities can have tragic consequences.

I am enclosing a copy of a new report released by Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights (MV FHR) and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). The report, titled *Double Tragedies*, brings you the voices of experience: family members of victims killed by persons with severe mental illness, and family members of persons with severe mental illness who have been executed. These family members, who know firsthand the devastation of homicide, are calling for the elimination of the death penalty for severely mentally ill offenders and reform of the mental health system. One of the members featured in the report, Linda Gregory, is the widow of a member of law enforcement who was killed by someone with a severe mental illness.

I urge you to read the *Double Tragedies* report and listen to the compelling voices contained within it. Working for prevention through treatment of mental illness prior to a murder being committed rather than expending precious state resources on the death penalty will make us all safer.

Sincerely,



Representative Renny Cushing

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