# Statement of John L. Clark for the Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment September 22, 2008

My name is John Clark, and I have been a resident of Gaithersburg, Maryland for the past 17 years. First of all, Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, as a Maryland citizen, I would like to express to each of you my great appreciation for your valuable service and deliberation on this important Commission.

I come to you from the perspective of a 35-year corrections professional, most of it in the Federal Bureau of Prisons where I began in the uniformed ranks, became a maximum security warden, and retired several years ago as Assistant Director of the agency.

I am here to speak against capital punishment. After previously supporting its use in some circumstances, I have come to strongly believe that the death penalty serves no useful purpose for society or for the safe and effective management of prisons.

Indeed the capital punishment process diminishes us as a society, and in particular it diminishes those correctional workers involved in administering and carrying it out.

I have known and been responsible for the day-to-day custody of many men who are convicted murderers, including in a few cases those who had killed staff members in my own agency. Twice I have worked in prisons in the wake of the brutal murders of staff by prisoners, in one case the horrible murder of two staff the same day.

Eventually I served as Warden at what was originally the first so-called Super Max facility in the country, the U.S. Penitentiary at Marion, Illinois.

Like other jurisdictions, we had to confront one issue that I know has been of legitimate concern in Maryland to our legislators and citizens: How do you manage violent and even repeat murderers in a prison setting? In the absence of the death penalty, can it be done without putting prison workers at undue risk?

Time does not permit me to go into great detail, but I know from experience that it can be done. In the Federal Bureau of Prisons in the 1980's, we developed at the Marion Penitentiary a model for segregating and controlling prisoners who were particularly violent in prison.

When a prisoner attacks another prisoner or staff, we determined his life should become much more harsh, and totally controlled in even its minutest detail.

Some form of this lock-down, Super Max model later was adopted in most states, including Maryland when it established the Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center. To be clear, I have never worked in the Maryland prison system and am not closely familiar with its operation and management.

But from years of first hand experience, I know that there are effective means of managing violent offenders in confinement. Indeed, I feel strongly that in the correctional setting in particular, the whole issue is typically an emotional distraction that diverts the focus and attention away from real problems or more effective prison management measures.

Based on my long experience as a hands-on correctional administrator, I believe it is much more important to put the resources into good management, adequate staffing and modern, secure facilities rather than spending the human and financial resources to pursue death sentences that most often will never be carried out.

In my judgment, the capital punishment process diminishes us as a society. Indeed the death penalty is not an effective deterrent and the arguments for it, some of which I previously espoused, I have come to see as hollow and misguided.

I urge you to recommend abolition of capital punishment in Maryland.

Thank you

John L. Clark
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