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Testimony of Mark Nichols, Executive Director
Assembly Judiciary Committee
Supporting AB 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17.
February 10, 2003

Good morning Chairman Anderson and members of the Assembly Judiciary committee. For the record my name is Mark Nichols, executive director of the National Association of Social Workers - Nevada Chapter. I am here to speak in support of the study subcommittee's recommendations and their five death penalty reform bills.

Rather than testifying on each recommendation I would like to offer the members of this committee a framework to help you make your decisions. Is it a fair process? Is it an accurate process? Is it an equitable system?

The people deserve fairness in the death penalty system. Fairness is shared value we should be able to expect on such a critical decision. During your annual basketball game both sides of the aisle expect that their hoop will be the same size and height as the other side's. We all believe there should be an even playing field. You will be asked to address concerns about the fairness of Nevada's death penalty system.

I would hope we all demand that the death penalty system is accurate. No one wants the burden of executing an innocent person. I am confident that none of you would want to vote against a measure that could, in the future, prevent an innocent person from being executed. I trust that we share the weight of that burden.

Finally, I believe that we can all agree that the death penalty must be equitable in its application. This is part of the fairness issue. If one person commits a murder under a certain set of circumstances and is sentenced to death then any other person under similar circumstance should also receive the same sentence. We need to be absolutely certain that this is occurring in Nevada. And, if you agree that it isn't, then we must take far more drastic steps to reform our system.

The debate around the death penalty is extremely emotional. But remember, you are not being asked to take an anti-death penalty position during this debate. You will be asked to address the fairness, the accuracy and the equality of Nevada's death penalty. I ask you to approve those reforms that you agree are appropriate and necessary to ensure a fair, accurate and equitable death penalty system.

Thank you Chairman Anderson for this opportunity to speak and to the members of the committee for your willingness to listen. I hope you will agree that the five bills are necessary reforms to our system and that you will vote yes on each of them.

ASSEMBLY JUDICIARY
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