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By IKE MGBATOGU

Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – The decision by the Ohio House of Representative Criminal Justice Committee to tour one of Ohio's death row chambers last week was good news for anti-capital punishment gadfly State Representative Ted Celeste who probably relished the opportunity to tell committee members: "I can show you better than I can tell you."

"I believe it is important for lawmakers to take an in-depth look at the death penalty process,

and this tour is an important step in creating a better understanding of why capital punishment should be abolished in Ohio," said Celeste, who was a member of the excursion. "The state should not be in the business of killing prisoners when there are less costly ways to punish the guilty and more morally defensible options."

Celeste and Representative Nickie J. Antonio are fiercely pushing to end capital punishment in t he Buckeye state. They are co-sponsors of House Bill 160, also known as the "Execute Justice" bill, aimed at bringing death penalty to an end. Celeste and Antonio have maintained that "Life without parole" is a better option because in their view, "it costs less and it does not compromise public safety."

The tour was part of the hearing now taking place as the committee considers HB 160. And as Celeste and Antonio put it, it was "to see firsthand what it means to be on death row."

Lately, Celeste and Antonio have had a relay of positive developments favoring their cause.

Recently, Governor John Kasich, agreeing with the Ohio Parole Board, pardoned Joseph Murphy who spent 24 years on death row, deciding to commute his sentence to life in prison. The governor grounded his decision on what he said was "Murphy's borderline mental retardation, and brutally abusive upbringing, including sexual abuse at the hand of his parents."

A highly pleased Celeste and Antonio praised Kasich's action, but still maintained that the ultimate answer for this kind of situation and other issues involving the death penalty is to permanently end capital punishment in Ohio.

"This tour comes just as the Governor has granted clemency to a death row inmate, showing that the option of life in prison without parole is strong alternative to the death penalty," said Antonio. "The governor's decision is the right one in the short term, and HB 160 is the right answer for the long term. Ohio should abolish capital punishment."

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Months before that, U.S. District Judge Gregory Frost halted Kevin Smith's date with death. And recently, State Senator Edna Brown from Toledo said that she is planning to introduce a bill similar to HB 160 in the senate.

Celeste and Antonio are agog about this string of activities occurring in favor of jettisoning the death penalty in Ohio.

"These recent developments clearly demonstrate a need for Ohio to re-examine its use of the death penalty," said Celeste.

The argument by Celeste and Antonio against capital punishment rests on a number of key factors.

"Between higher costs, geographical and racial disparity, moral and ethical dilemmas, and an upcoming shortage of the lethal injection drug used by the state, all signs point to the abolishment of the death penalty," they said.

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