



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

**TESTIMONY**  
**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS**  
**Criminal Jurisprudence Committee**  
**HB 3080**  
**Monday, April 10, 2017**

I am Betsy Singleton, testifying as a member and on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Texas in **support of House Bill 3080**. We appreciate this opportunity to appear before you today. Thank you for allowing us to share the League of Women Voters of Texas position on this bill.

The League supports HB 3080. The League of Women Voters believes that imprisonment should be explored and utilized by taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime. We believe in protection of public health and safety. Our position on capital punishment like other League positions is derived through a lengthy and thoughtful process involving the participation of 25 local Leagues.

The League supports an equitable system of criminal justice in Texas with:

- improvements in pretrial justice programs,
- an adequately state funded public defender system,
- prohibition of the execution of persons with intellectual and developmental disability, the mentally ill, and juveniles under the age of 18 at the time the crime was committed, and
- establishing clear, uniform and clinical standards consistent with accepted professional practices to determine intellectual and developmental disability and mental illness.

HB 3080 would prevent offenders who have been proven to have had a severe mental illness at the time of their crime from being sentenced to death in a capital murder case. People with severe mental illness, as defined in the active psychiatric illness listed in Sec. 1355.001, Insurance Code, should receive a continuity of care services which could help prevent the psychotic symptoms that substantially impair the person's capacity to understand the nature, consequences, or wrongfulness of the person's conduct. The League believes that a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost should be available to all U.S. residents.

Texas has executed people who have not understood that they are to be executed and should not continue this practice. For example, one past death row inmate could not finish his last meal before his execution, so he asked his executioners to save his food for when he returned to his cell.

This bill would improve the treatment of the severely mentally ill. No one chooses to be mentally ill. They are so incapacitated that they are not able to plead not guilty by reason of insanity, or if they are convicted, they cannot hope that their defense attorney will be able to persuade juries to hand down a life sentence instead of an execution.



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A better solution is to approve HB 3080 which respects the dignity of the mentally ill and prevents cruel and unusual punishment. We all rely on our public structures to create a just society. Executing the severely mentally ill is not fair. The community has a role in protecting the public, so life without parole for people with severe mental illness also will protect the public.

**For additional information, please contact: Susybelle Gosslee Issue Chair,**  
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The League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) is a nonpartisan citizens' organization that has fought since 1919 to improve our government and engage all citizens in the decisions that impact their lives. It represents more than 5000 members and supporters throughout Texas.

The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes candidates for office or political parties. The member-driven organization of women and men encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and seeks to influence public policy through education and advocacy of positions based on extensive issue study and consensus.