Most of the cost - 70% - is wrapped up in the trial phase of a capital case. The death penalty process is more complicated because a life is on the line. Capital cases involve more lawyers, witnesses, experts, pre-trial motions, a longer jury selection process, and countless other expenses that rack up exorbitant costs before even a single appeal is filed.

Many victims' family members oppose the death penalty. Some of the most vocal and active members of OTSE have lost a loved one to homicide. Even those who favor the death penalty have expressed frustration with the lengthy and high-profile nature of capital cases. Instead of investing millions of dollars and decades of energy into a few death penalty cases, we could ensure all Ohio victims' families get the healing support they need.

Since 1973, more than 185 death row inmates have been exonerated of all charges and released. 11 of those were in Ohio, which means for every five executions, one person has been exonerated in our state. Some of the factors leading to wrongful convictions include (1) eyewitness mistake; (2) inadequate representation; (3) perjury by witnesses; (4) prosecutorial misconduct; or (5) jurors who did not understand the process.

The death penalty is the most expensive part of our criminal justice system. Studies across the nation have found that death penalty cases cost up to ten times more than non-death penalty cases. Without the death penalty, these resources could be used to help survivors, support mental health initiatives, and promote new initiatives to keep communities safe.

More than 70% of people on Ohio's death row are there for a murder of a white person, even though more than half of all homicide victims are black. Of the 138 inmates on Ohio's death row, more than half are people of color even though they only make up 16% of Ohio's population. Data shows that 87% of black exonerees who were sentenced to death were victims of official misconduct compared to 67% of white death row exonerees.

Severity of the crime does not determine who gets a death sentence. Access to adequate defense counsel, the county where the crime was committed, and the county prosecutor’s personal views and approach to the death penalty are the biggest factors in determining whether or not someone receives a death sentence. Just five counties in Ohio – Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, and Summit are responsible for 68% of Ohio death cases.

There is no evidence that having a death penalty in place deters violent crime. Indeed, the FBI Uniform Crime Report has repeatedly showed that the South, which accounts for over 80% of executions, has the highest murder rate.
The activists were in the right place because their opposition stems from conservative principles. Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty believe that the faithful who gathered at the annual event hosted by the Faith and Freedom Coalition are ripe for embracing their critical view of capital punishment.

They have their work cut out for them. Yes, support for death penalties has been dropping in a Pew survey — from 78% in 1996 to 55% last year. But this barbaric practice still enjoys strong preference among conservatives, with 69% expressing support in a June ABC News/Washington Post poll. Only 49% of liberals agreed. Among Republicans, support is even higher — at 81%.

So what kind of reception did the activists receive? The group's advocacy coordinator, Marc Hyden, told me the response was very positive. "The myth we are trying to shatter is that conservatives all support the death penalty." Hyden, who had worked for the National Rifle Association, said many people who approached the booth expressed support, while one man who didn't was converted after Hyden laid out the conservative case against the death penalty.

Hyden said, "The case is simple. Conservative policies are supposed to be ... pro-life, fiscally responsible, and limited government. We risk taking innocent life, it costs more than life without parole, and I can't think of a bigger government program than one where you can kill your citizens."

He rejected claims by death penalty supporters that it's a deterrent to crime. He's right. According to FBI data, the South accounts for more than 80% of U.S. executions but has the highest murder rate in the country.

Hyden also warned that conservatives should be concerned about the lack of transparency in the states carrying out executions. For example, Florida, Georgia and Missouri, which were first to resume lethal injections after a botched execution in Oklahoma in April, refuse to say where they get their drugs or even whether they are tested. Hyden asked, "Do we trust our government to have secrets like these?"

There are conservatives who have supported repeals of the death penalty in New Hampshire, Kentucky, Montana and South Dakota. Many conservatives who oppose the death penalty invoke their pro-life beliefs, such as Jay Sekulow, chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice, a conservative Christian law firm affiliated with Regent University in Virginia Beach. Sekulow said, "I'm opposed to the death penalty. ... The taking of life is not the way to handle even the most significant of crimes."

State Sen. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., echoed this sentiment in support of repealing the death penalty in his state. "Until we promote a culture of life ... there will always be an argument to terminate life in one form or another," he said.

Conservatives have a strong case on this issue. Hopefully, people will listen.

Over 7,000 people were executed in the United States in the 20th century.

Over 3,000 men and women now sit on death rows across the country.

Since 1976 when the death penalty was reinstated by the Supreme Court, 1,400 people have been executed.

Over the same period, 156 people on death row were exonerated—reflecting approximately a 10% error rate.

That means approximately, 700 people were killed erroneously and 300 of the 3,000 people currently sitting on death row could be exonerated.