

EXPLORING THE SUPPORT NETWORKS OF THOSE CARING FOR  
LOVED ONES ON TEXAS DEATH ROW

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To my husband, who supports my passion,  
and to my daughters, whose bright futures light the way.

I love you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Supporters of death row inmates suffer greatly and endure many hardships related to caring for a loved one on Texas' death row. This study aims to understand the support networks developed by caretakers of capital offenders, along with their current needs and barriers. While the research consistently shows the tremendous devastation the death penalty inflicts on offenders' family and friends, missing from the literature is an examination of the support provided by caretakers, their needs and obstacles, and the support available to them.

Data collected during this qualitative study reveals three types of support provided: emotional, comfort, and advocacy care, and a vast support network is available to some caretakers. The amount of backing depends on the supporter and the circumstances surrounding the offender and crime. The supporters' needs range from funding for care, removal of a loved one from death row, educating the public on capital punishment, and voice amplification. Major barriers include Texas statutes, money, and stigma. Key actants providing support include other supporters of capital offenders, one's appeals attorney, and nonprofit activist and religious organizations.

Understanding the impact experienced by the supporters under study will allow professionals to make more informed decisions regarding the death penalty and illuminate the ripple effects of trauma suffered by innocent members of Texas' communities. Restorative justice initiatives invite more research on the community impact of crime and punishment beyond the usual focus on healing and limiting the

damage caused by crime, and the reaction to crime presenting an opportunity for loved ones of those sentenced to be executed.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In 2018, Texas executed 13 offenders—more than all other states combined. Currently, 228 offenders await execution on Texas death row. For every person sentenced to die, dozens more are affected (Amnesty International 2001; United Nations, 2016). Research is limited but consistent regarding the impact on family and friends of capital offenders: they suffer intense and complicated grief with minimal to no support (Jones & Beck, 2007; Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Sharp, 2005; Smykla, 1987). This qualitative research study aims to understand the needs, obstacles, and support network(s) of those who care for Texas death row inmates. Understanding this population's unique set of circumstances allows for a more complete picture of the impact of capital punishment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Data regarding populations who suffer from the ripple effects of the criminal justice system are paramount to fairly assessing current policies. In this vein, supporters of death row inmates are critical to the overall impact the death penalty inflicts on Texas communities. The purpose of this study is to (1) document their processes, interactions, and stories; (2) piece together the experience with multiple sources of data; and (3) present clear data or possible solutions moving forward for this population and the research community.

Qualitative research on the supporters of capital offenders in Texas is necessary for many reasons. Studying supporters of capital offenders adds valuable documentation about the processes of this relatively unknown and shrinking population. Additionally, as society pushes toward more restorative approaches, research that illuminates the full

impact of capital punishment must be available to the public, legislators, educators, and legal professionals if they are to fairly evaluate the current process for executing members of the community. While this impact does not currently affect policy decisions regarding death as a sentencing option, the understanding of it will undoubtedly be critical in the future as the U.S. moves toward restorative justice initiatives (Eschholz, Reed, & Beck, 2003).

### **Research Questions**

To this effect, the research questions aim to categorize processes and elicit personal stories related to the experience of supporting capital offenders.

(R1) What support is provided by those caring for loved ones on Texas death row before and after execution?

(R2) What support do the caretakers need?

(R3) What obstacles exist at the different stages of the process?

(R4) How do they find the necessary support?

### **Overview**

The present thesis first reviews the literature available on the supporters of capital offenders, including the documented suffering, human rights concerns, and benefits of restorative justice as an ideal platform to address such issues. Next, the research design is explained, including the data collection process, researcher transparency, reflexivity, and ethical considerations. This section includes the complexities of the qualitative research and commitments needed to increase the integrity of the data collected.

To follow, a presentation of data and results includes categories and themes discovered through discourse analysis. The research questions are divided into (R1) types

of care, (R2) supporter needs, (R3) obstacles, and (R4) support obtained. Data presentations for R2, R3, and R4 are grouped together based on parent need. Data are listed with the research question number, followed by the number of the associated need. For example, funding for care is need number four. Therefore, the section label is R2.4 (i.e., research question two [needs], need number four [funding for care]). Quotes found throughout the findings section are coded and listed in quote tables in Appendices G, H, and I. The final section provides a summary of the results in relation to the past literature, interpretations of the data collected, future implications, and limitations.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

While data are sparse on individuals who care for capital offenders, the available research presents thorough and dedicated attention to understanding this vulnerable group of community members. Existing research on supporters falls into two categories: (1) understanding the suffering of this population and (2) examining the human rights violations inflicting this pain. The former focuses on the sociological and psychological impact of having a loved one on death row. With the assistance of criminology, sociology, psychology, and legal professionals, research related to human rights violations caused by capital punishment helps provide insight into the benefits of restorative justice initiatives. As restorative justice becomes more popular, minimizing the collateral damage of capital punishment could become an essential component in evaluating the statute.

### **Documented Suffering and Human Rights Concerns**

Research is consistent regarding the multidimensional consequences suffered by loved ones of capital offenders. These include (1) disenfranchised grief, defined as the inability to grieve in the open; (2) nonfinite loss, defined as a loop of continuous loss that includes the loss of one's hopes and dreams; (3) social stigmatization and isolation; and (4) a diminished to nonexistent support network (Beck, Britto, & Andrews, 2009; Jones & Beck, 2007; Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Smykla, 1987).

Supporters with loved ones on death row experience grief similar to those losing someone through a terminal illness, or a missing child. Described as a living death, caretakers must live in a reality of suspended mourning in a world centered on death (Johnson, 1981; Smykla, 1987). Some of these patterns are social isolation, changes in



personality or forgotten identities, manifestations of serious illnesses, and thoughts or acts of suicide.

Smykla (1987) explains the following:

They [capital offenders' loved ones] experience marital problems and high divorce rates, a sense of being abnormal and freakish, profound guilt, a sense of injustice engendered by being neglected by the criminal justice system, as well as a continuing rage and bitterness that eventually becomes debilitating (p. 333).

The grief patterns exhibited a link to the impending execution of a loved one irrespective of the time spent on death row (Smykla, 1987).

Most capital offenders and their loved ones come from oppressive and vulnerable backgrounds with a history of poverty (Beck et al., 2007; Smykla, 1987). Many have limited power to manage their situations or create change, thereby increasing their isolation, anger, and hopelessness (Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Radelet et al., 1983). As Radelet et al. (1983) explain, "First is the existence of objective barriers to maintaining supportive relationships, and second is a limited capacity to deal with these problems" (p. 599).

Supporting a capital offender is a considerable financial commitment. Financial obligations include exorbitant legal fees, frequent transportation needs, inmate commissary, and activism costs related to the offender's case. Issues with visiting the loved one on death row, including inability to travel and lack of funds, create barriers to maintaining a relationship with the loved one. Financial burdens like these contribute to depression, greater social isolation, and increased guilt among this population of caregivers (Beck et al., 2007; Smykla, 1987).

Existing research also reveals a debilitating stigma that adds to an already unbearable experience. Many loved ones of capital offenders isolate themselves in defense of the stigma associated with supporting someone on death row. Supporters may lose close friends and family members due to the controversial nature of their situations. To prevent future loss, many choose not to share their suffering to spare their inner circle the burden of knowing the weight they carry (Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Sharp, 2005). This “conspiracy of silence” further isolates this population of caretakers from the support they desperately need (Smykla, 1987).

Amnesty International and other research groups assert that capital offenders’ loved ones are covictims of the criminal justice system and susceptible to unbelievable grief and trauma from the process of supporting a loved one through an execution (Beck et al., 2007; Beck & Britto, 2006; Bessler, 2019; Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Sharp, 2005). Beck et al. (2007) state the following: “We maintain that crime victims’ and offenders’ family members, although deeply divided by violent crime, have similar experiences, including shared grief over the loss of the victim, isolation, trauma, depression, and frustration with the criminal justice system” (p. 4). Bessler (2019) contends that the victimization caused by the death penalty produces such trauma that it is a direct infringement on the rights of those impacted; capital punishment is inherently torturous and an affront to human dignity. Bessler continues to argue that the Supreme Court should “take into consideration the psychological torture suffered by everyone else associated with the death penalty” (p. 85).

According to King and Norgard (1999), the stigma placed upon the family of capital offenders is due to state policy excluding this population from victim resources,

which are solely available to the murder victim's loved ones. Family and friends supporting capital offenders through an execution experience the violent deaths of their loved ones. Their experience contradicts the consensus that the execution of a person by the state is not a killing, not painful, and does not create additional victims with the offender's subsequent death (Sharp, 2005). The absence of support from the community and applicable resources increases an already devastating situation (King & Norgard, 1999).

Twenty-three years after *Furman*, and 333 executions later, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill (H.B.) 93, which updated the cause of death from "homicide" to "judicial execution": The death certificate of a decedent who was an inmate of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice at the time of death and who was lawfully executed shall classify the death as a death caused by judicial execution (HB 93, 2005). While the wording for the cause of death has changed, the experience for family and friends has not (Jones & Beck, 2007). Without an official title of "victim" or "co-victim," loved ones of capital offenders are not eligible for the beneficial resources offered to co-victims. Homicide co-victims have the opportunity to share victim impact statements with the jury during sentencing and to access the mental health services necessary for coping with such trauma. As stated earlier, the distinction of the victim is reserved solely for the crime victim, which adds to the social stigma.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) defines a victim as a person "who has suffered personal injury or death as a result of the criminal conduct of another," including close relatives of the deceased victim. The relatives are defined as "a person who was the spouse of a deceased victim at the time of the victim's death, or who is a

parent, adult brother, sister, or child of the deceased victim” (The Crime Victims’ Rights, Texas Code of Criminal Procedure arts. 56.01–56.021). TDCJ’s definitions of victim and co-victim pertain solely to the crime itself, but many claim capital punishment creates additional victims (Beck et al., 2007; Beck & Britto, 2006; Bessler, 2019; Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Sharp, 2005).

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice seeks to protect the interconnectedness between humans. Zehr (2002) lists five fundamental principles of restorative justice: (1) focus on harm and the needs of the victims and offenders, including the greater community; (2) address the outcome of those harms; (3) practice inclusivity and collaboration; (4) include all those who will experience impact, including victims, offenders, and society; and (5) aim to right the wrongs for those involved.

Typically, restorative justice initiatives focus on the offender (cause of harm) and those victimized by the offender’s crime. For a capital offense, the victims created are the deceased (victim of crime) and their family (co-victims of crime). A death sentence does not prioritize restoration between the criminal offender and subsequent victims/co-victims. There is no restoring life after an execution. However, restorative justice is also concerned with how reactions to crime impact communities and society (Zehr, 2002). From this perspective, the cause of the damage is not an offender but the criminal justice system. Societal victims of the death penalty system include the voice of the capital offender’s family and friends (Beck et al., 2007).

The death penalty is the ultimate expression of retributive justice. Restorative justice acknowledges the ripple effect of damage caused to community members by the

justice system. Restorative justice promotes healing while reducing the overall harm of crime. In contrast, retributive justice concentrates solely on the crime itself and the appropriate punishment (Zehr, 2002). Currently, trends in U.S. justice initiatives favor restorative justice methods over retributive punishment. The therapeutic methods of the former help foster interest in reducing the human consequences coupled with severe penal sanctions.

Research on the needs of all those impacted, including the community, is the only way “to reach true restoration” (Eschholz et al., 2003, p. 177). Missing from the literature is a close examination of the supporters’ processes of care: what support they provide and how they find support, themselves. Research that categorizes the support provided, clarifies the social networks, and pairs the needs with related obstacles will add to existing data concerning the impact of capital punishment in its totality.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions are structured based on clarification of support types, needs, obstacles to needs, and support available to meet these needs. The data on this population is limited; therefore, an initial categorization of the various types of support provided was essential to further inspect needs, obstacles, and resulting support networks. With that in mind, the following research questions were formulated:

- (R1) What support is provided by those caring for loved ones on Texas death row before and after execution?
- (R2) What support do the caretakers need?
- (R3) What obstacles exist at the different stages of the process?
- (R4) How do they find the necessary support?

## **Summary**

Existing research on supporters of capital offenders has largely focused on understanding the suffering of this population and examining the human rights violations related to capital punishment. A review of the literature shows supporters of capital offenders suffer incredible grief and trauma associated with the process of capital punishment. This population also suffers from the debilitating stigma and has limited to no access to resources that help support a loved one on death row.

The damage caused by a state-sanctioned killing generates numerous questions concerning the ripple effect of capital punishment within society. Despite the serious legal, political, social, and financial consequences of capital punishment, there is little research that examines the community impact of the death sentence (Eschholz, Reed, & Beck, 2003). Understanding the full collateral damage of the death penalty is vital to an honest evaluation of capital punishment. The current trend towards restorative justice prioritizes community healing by widening the victimization circle of the death penalty and offering supporters a voice toward reducing their despair.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The purpose of this study is to document, understand, and examine the experiences of those who support loved ones on Texas death row. Data generated from this study aim to contribute much-needed research on capital punishment and its impact on the community. The decline in the death penalty is reflective of a cultural shift in the U.S. criminal justice system; it mainly shows a move from retributive to more restorative methods. To develop fair and thorough restorative-driven initiatives, research data on those in the community impacted are essential. Information regarding the experiences of capital offenders' loved ones provides a vital glimpse into the ripple effect of the death penalty and its devastation on members of the community.

The research design for the study triangulates data using three qualitative data collection methods: (1) semi-structured interviews; (2) semi-structured focus groups; and (3) participant (field) observations within the framework of narrative criminology (NC). Qualitative research attempts to build relationships with participants while staying open to the research environment, participants, and the data collected (Clark & Sharf, 2007). Guba and Lincoln (1981) refer to the qualitative researcher as an instrument: "human beings as instruments possess at least one virtue lacking in all others' judgment, along with the flexibility to be able to use it" (p. 72). The natural flow in data collection provides many advantages, such as more fluid, participant-led dialogue and immersion in the group under study.

NC attempts to gain insight by intimately exploring interpretations of consequences related to crime and the criminal justice system (Pemberton, Aarten, & Mulder, 2019). The NC framework centers on stories of power and influence while

attempting to study “the constructive fluidity and malleability of social forms” to provide the hope of change (Holsten & Gubrium, 2000, p. 503). All people, including the researcher, create their personal views of the world based on their own experiences; they develop constructed realities or narratives from a vast collection of opinions, impressions, and inferences created over time. As a suitable approach to studying resistance to injury and stigma, NC aims to expose the social hierarchies that control the dominant narrative. As Presser and Sandberg (2019) explain, NC is fundamentally concerned with the dynamics of harm and, therefore, the possibilities of resistance. Due to its inherent subjectivity, NC holds crime, the criminal justice system, behavior, stigma, and deviance as data regardless of “objective” truth or criminal behavior (Copes & Miller, 2015).

### **Data Collection**

The thesis research design is a triangulation of three qualitative methods: (1) semi-structured interviews; (2) semi-structured focus groups; and (3) participant observations. Data collection lasted for approximately four months from July 11, 2019, to November 20, 2019. Data collected are from (1) 11 interviews; (2) one focus group; and (3) eight field observations held during the timeframe of the study. All three sources of data collection provide fruitful information on this reasonably unknown population of care providers.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The study presented leverages convenience snowball sampling. As the researcher, I discovered the first key informant while watching the documentary “Road to Livingston,” which focuses on one sister’s experience supporting her brother on Texas death row. I made initial contact through Facebook, with a phone call scheduled soon



after. I explained the study briefly, and the key informant agreed to assist in finding additional participants. She suggested the second key informant, who is a critical leader in the community of caretakers. After the second informant accepted my invitation to assist in the study, the first round of interviews with both key informants were scheduled.

The process continued throughout the study as key informants and other interviewees recommended additional volunteers when possible. As the researcher, I also approached individuals during field observations and provided them with information regarding the study and an invitation to contribute, if interested. The strict requirements said participants must be individuals who love someone on death row or must be people who support or care for those individuals in any way. Indicators of applicable participants were public speeches, materials retrieved from public events, or conversations while in the field. Once identified as suitable participants for the study, potential contributors were prioritized based on (1) their status as primary support providers; (2) their relationships with the offender (family, spouses, and friends, prioritized in that order); and, finally, (3) the length of time they had offered support. Interested individuals were scheduled for a 1.5 hr interview. When a meeting was not possible due to travel or time constraints, phone interviews were arranged. Of the 11 interviews, five were done in person, with six occurring over the phone.

Initial communication with potential participants began through Facebook messenger and progressed to text message or email. Before ending the interview, I informed participants of the need for additional interviewees, encouraging them to pass on the invitation to other supporters in their network. Study participants typically would reach out to other supporters and then confirm interest by either passing on their contact

information or sending a group Facebook message. This pattern continued through the duration of the interviews conducted. Participant observations attended were advocacy opportunities for the population under study, including protests and rallies. For this reason, many participants interviewed are active advocates of capital offenders currently living on Texas death row.

The key informants' approval and acceptance of me as the researcher were critical to gaining trust quickly during field observations. As essential leaders of the support network under study, key informants offer the assurance that many other potential participants need to trust my intentions. Of the interviews (n=11), two were key informants, six were secured through key informants' or other participants' recommendations, and three were recruited from participant observations. Convenience sampling occurred during advocacy events; therefore, many participants are also activists for their loved one on Texas death row. Ultimately, the original goal of accessing 20 or more participants for interviews was not possible. In order to gain the trust and attention necessary for participation, more time was required to reach theoretical saturation. Limited participation issues are examined in the Limitations section of chapter 5.

The sample of interviewees consisted of 11 adults (18 years and older) who were caring for, or had previously cared for, a loved one incarcerated on Texas death row, including family members, friends, and romantic partners. Table 1 displays the relationship to the offender, the number of individuals they were supporting or had supported on Texas death row, the length of time supporting, their estimated age, and their gender.

Participants varied in age, relationship, and the types of support provided. Ages spanned from the early -20s to the mid-70s. More than half of those interviewed were supporting only one loved one on death row. Those supporting more than one offender were typically older. Most of them spoke of supporting only one person in the beginning, but then providing care for other friends over the years. The number of persons supported on death row represents the total number of capital offenders in the entirety of the time the supporter is involved. For example, Sofia, “sister, friend,” has supported up to 25 capital offenders she loves as friends at various levels of attention and support. While her primary focus is her brother, she has become close to many other capital offenders over the 20 years of providing support to her sibling.

Table 1.

*Interview Participant Information*

Participant	Relationship to offender(s)	No. of persons supporting /have supported	Years supporting	Age range	Sex
Bill	In-law, friend	1–5	25+	60+	M
Kathy	In-law, friend	1–25	20+	60+	F
Sofia	Sister, friend	1–25	20+	50–60	F
Stephanie	Wife	1	10+	30–40	F
Polly	Wife	1	10+	30–40	F
Diane	Mother (adopted), friend	2–25	10+	60+	F
Lisa	Sister	1	20+	50–60	F
Jen	In-law	1	5+	20–30	F
Chris	Nephew	1	15+	20–30	M
Brenda	Wife	1	5?	30–40	F
June	Friend	3	15+	50–60	F

## Interview Protocol

The interview protocol asked a variety of questions pertaining to the support provided, the help participants subsequently needed, barriers that presented, and the

resulting support networks (see Appendix A). The first half of the interviews focused on participants' stories: how they became supporters, why they support, and what support they are providing. The second half reviewed obstacles to providing support, support available, and levels of support obtained from their surrounding communities. Additional questions helped identify a collective narrative for the group of supporters. These included advice to future supporters, thoughts on how Americans perceive capital punishment, and motivational factors that kept them supporting their loved ones on death row. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility according to relevancy to the interviewee in the protocol.

### **Focus Group**

Participants for focus groups were recruited using the same approach implemented with the interview participants. The study design included three focus groups with at least four participants each. The geographic distance between willing participants, however, created scheduling difficulties. After I exhausted all interviewee contacts for potential focus groups, the most active key informant in the study was able to recruit two participants for one focus group (see Table 2). The focus group took place at the researcher's rental near the Allan B. Polunsky Unit and lasted for approximately 1.5 hr. Focus group participants were acquaintances and spoke openly throughout the conversation. All three participants were friends of capital offenders and active advocates. The quality of the data produced from the one focus group did not meet the standards set forth by the research design. Only three participants could be arranged, of which one had also been interviewed. However, the study's focus group design allowed for productive validation of emerging themes from the interviewee data.

Participants provided verbal consent before discussing the support provided, needs, and significant obstacles (see Appendix B). Participants listed their answers on post-it notes and then placed the post-it notes on the whiteboard under the categories of support provided, needs to support, and obstacles to needs. The participants and I reviewed the answers displayed on the whiteboard. Data collected from the focus group consisted of images of notes and audio transcription.

Table 2.

*Focus Group Participant Information*

Participant	Relationship to offender(s)	No. of persons supporting/ have supported	Years supporting	Age range	Sex
1	In-law, friend	1–25	20+	60+	F
2	Friend	1–25	10+	50+	F
3	Friend	1–5	5+	40+	F

### **Participant Observations**

Participant observations comprised of field observations from eight events during the timeframe of data collection. Observed events included four execution protests, an annual anti-death penalty march, and three Rodney Reed advocacy events. The four execution protests took place outside the Walls Unit in Huntsville, Texas. Protests in opposition to the execution of a capital offender scheduled for 6:00 p.m. that day (see Table 3). The additional participant observations were support events held during the timeframe of data collection, including Rodney Reed family events and the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual March to Abolish the Death Penalty in Austin, Texas. Data collected included public speeches, chants, and detailed descriptions of the events under observation. Speeches from family members and their supporters during the observed events allowed for rich data that gave me incredible insights into the research questions I was examining.

## Execution Protests

The four execution protests observed were instrumental to my gaining trust among key leaders in the support group network. This acceptance opened windows for possible participants and allowed for honest interactions during field observations. The execution protests in Texas take place outside the death house, or Walls Unit, in Huntsville, Texas. Yellow security tape defines the protest area perimeter, with several correctional guards nearby for crowd control. Attendance at the protests, I observed varied depending on the offender being executed and ranged from 5 to over 100 attendees. Execution protests started at 5:00 p.m. and lasted until approximately 6:30 p.m. if there were no legal delays to the execution. Many of the protest attendees had loved ones on death row or were individual activists for the abolition of the death penalty. The lead execution protest activists are Gloria Rubac of The Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement and Linda Snyder and Dani Gran of The Death Row Angels of Texas.

Table 3.  
*Field Observation Information*

	Event Name	Date	Location
1	Execution protest for Larry Swearingen	8/21/19	Huntsville, TX
2	Execution protest for Billy Jack Crutsinger	9/04/19	Huntsville, TX
3	Execution protest for Mark Soliz	9/10/19	Huntsville, TX
4	“Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the Execution!”	9/21/19	Bastrop, TX
5	Execution protest for Robert Sparks	9/25/19	Huntsville, TX
6	“Rally to Stop Execution of Rodney Reed & Demand DNA Testing”	9/27/19	Austin, TX
7	“20th Annual March to Abolish the Death Penalty”	10/19/19	Austin, TX
8	“Shaun King Is Speaking in Austin, Texas, at a Rally to Free Rodney Reed”	11/9/19	Austin, TX

## **Family of Rodney Reed Events**

The family of Rodney Reed held three of the events observed: (1) the family kick-off “Rally for Justice”; (2) the first Governor’s Mansion rally and Texas Capitol march; and (3) the last Governor’s Mansion rally and Texas Capitol march led by Shaun King, a celebrity BlackLivesMatter activist. The timing of data collection and the scheduled execution of Rodney Reed offered incredible insight into the support networks of those caring for loved ones on Texas death row. Most importantly, the Reed family experience displays the shift in support after a set execution date. The total support garnered by the Reed campaign FreeRodneyReed, led by brother, Rodrick, and mother, Sandra, includes A-list celebrities, international news coverage, Texas legislators, and millions of individual online supporters.

**Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the Execution!** The Reed family kick-off rally occurred 60 days before the scheduled execution date of Rodney Reed. Bastrop’s Kerr Community Center, a converted old country church across the street from the Reed family home, hosted the rally on September 21, 2019. Approximately 100 supporters attended the event including (1) other families with loved ones on Texas death row, (2) religious leaders, (3) exonerees, (4) appeals professionals, (5) family and friends, (6) media professionals, (7) abolition activists, and (8) public servants committed to the Reed cause.

The Reed family rally was a speaker series and dinner event with various vital supporters from the campaign FreeRodneyReed. The individuals who spoke during the rally gave brilliant insight into the process of gaining support to stop the execution of a loved one on Texas death row.

**Rally to stop execution of Rodney Reed and demand DNA testing and Shaun King's Austin, Texas, rally to FreeRodneyReed.** The second FreeRodneyReed rally and Texas Capitol march was on September 27, 2019. Lily Hughes, a Reed family friend and abolition activist, hosted the rally and march with Rodrick Reed, brother of Rodney Reed. Approximately 50 participants gathered in front of the Governor's Mansion in Austin, Texas. The march started at the Governor's Mansion in downtown Austin and ended in front of the Texas Capitol steps.

**Shaun King is speaking in Austin, Texas, at a rally to FreeRodneyReed.** The final Governor's Mansion rally and Texas Capitol march took place on November 9, 2019, six weeks after the initial rally and march. The two events allowed clear documentation of the Reed family's progress during the campaign FreeRodneyReed. A two-hour special on the Dr. Phil show as well as advocacy by Kim Kardashian, Shaun King, and others grew global support for the campaign by millions. Speakers included celebrity activist Shaun King, Austin mayor Steve Adler, politicians, family members of the murder victim, and many of the Reeds' support group speakers. Attendees increased from 50 at the September 27 march to upwards of 1,000 at the November 9 march. Celebrity and other activist efforts on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram increased support exponentially.

### **Twentieth Annual March to Abolish the Death Penalty**

The 20<sup>th</sup> annual March to Abolish the Death Penalty took place on October 19, 2019, in Austin, Texas. Individuals from across the state attended and assembled on the steps of the Texas Capitol for the anti-death penalty speaker series. The sidewalk march started at the Capitol steps, progressed down Congress Avenue, and then turned toward



the Governor's Mansion. Most speakers were family and friends of capital offenders, offering invaluable insight regarding the population under study.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from this research were generated from transcribed digital audio recordings of interviews, focus groups, and related public events; the video recording of the focus group; and detailed journaling of the events, along with diary entries on how the experience was affecting the researcher's perceptions of the events under observation. Audio/video recordings were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the software NVIVO.

The study presented was designed and executed through the lens of narrative criminology with narrative discourse analysis guiding the coding and analysis process. Discourse analysis is the discipline of seeking clues in the sequence of talk, interactions, or the context of a situation, including social acts by individuals or groups; social structure; and personal, group, or social language, which includes memories, opinions, and shared cultures (Abell & Myers, 2008). As Fairclough and Wodak (1997) describe, discourse analysis holds the belief that power relations, society, and culture are based on discourse. Careful discourse analysis is explanatory and interpretive with the belief that culture, and its past, are strongly linked to a shared discourse resulting in ideological, explanatory ideas. Discourse analysis adds various subtle interactions and nonverbal cues to critical content analysis, which gives the description a richness that transcends words, with a more significant understanding of the experience under study. Van Dijk (1985) defines such context as "the mentally represented structure of those properties of the

social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse” (p. 356).

Narrative discourse analysis builds a creative structure organized around three key features: (1) chronological periods, (2) plot descriptors, and (3) characters or actants. Core to the narrative framework is chronology. The analysis divides narratives into the beginning, middle, and end in order to better understand the context of the plot unfolding (Prior, 2014). For this study, there are two *chronological periods*: (1) before an execution date is set and (2) after an execution date is set.

*Plot descriptors* include feelings (frustration, fear, love), characteristics (strong, guarded, inclusive), and objects or actions (money, visits, letters). These plot descriptors help illuminate the critical context of the constructed narrative between actants and the supporters under study. *Actants* include individuals, groups/subgroups, and institutions (correctional officer, media, and Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles). Actants illustrate the key players associated with the participants’ support network, along with the supporters’ needs and obstacles.

The codebook is the result of actants, plot descriptors, and chronological periods (before or after an execution date is set) discovered in the transcripts. NVIVO allows for text mining for main actants and plot descriptors in each narrative. During the creation of the codebook, themes emerged that allowed the natural categorization of the data. The final codebook is a refinement of the codes and themes presented through NVIVO. Manual content analysis grouped content by theme (e.g., stigma), similar and contrasting actants, plot descriptors, and chronological periods (before and after an execution date is

set). A thorough review of the content in each group offered further examination of the themes regarding the research questions for the study.

### **Transparency and Reflexivity**

The positioning of the researcher is essential not only for narrative criminology but also specifically for individuals supporting loved ones on death row. Qualitative research on interpersonal relationships and social problems includes a strong ethical responsibility to the study's informants. It is critical that researchers observing crime and those involved not legitimize inequalities (Pressner & Sandberg, 2019). Some have even adopted an activist position. King (2005) states, "While I was predisposed to oppose capital punishment before I began this project, seeing how the process made the families suffer turned my intellectual opposition into a calling to work to end the practice" (p. 292). Previous research suggests the researcher's position on capital punishment matters when gaining trust from this population. Even a belief of "neutral" has the potential to trigger trauma and destroy trust (Beck & Britto, 2006; Joy, 2013). Beck et al. (2007) quote a participant from their research as stating, "Knowing that she was not for the death penalty really helped. I would have never talked to her if she had not been" (p. 67).

As the researcher, I am opposed to the death penalty. Due to this bias, transparency and reflexivity are paramount to the validity of the project and the well-being of the participants. This intense process relies on competent and frequent reflexivity as my narrative intertwines with the stories, beliefs, and experiences of the participants under study.

Reflexivity is critical to qualitative research, narrative criminology (NC), and discourse analysis. Researchers inject their narratives and thoughts into the study,

creating and selecting interactions while defining data through their filters of experience (Copes & Miller, 2015). Because the researcher plays an integral role in the process, objectivity is not possible. Reflexivity and transparency are paramount in managing these challenges. NC acknowledges the collective creation of stories, and reflexivity assists the researchers in their attempts to find themselves in this shared story and explicitly state their roles within (Pressner & Sandberg, 2019).

Reflective research is necessary in four areas of analysis: research procedures, interpretive activities, political and ideological elements of research, and authoritative representation in the subject (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2017). In NC, researchers are coproducing narratives with their participants. If stories can create action, as NC asserts, reflexivity is necessary to understand the constructed narratives. This attention to the narrative, with committed reflection, maximizes the benefits of qualitative research by collecting rich, valid data (Copes & Miller, 2015).

To explicitly show subjectivity and prioritize reflexivity, I kept a journal that tracked my pre-/post-interview reflections and observations, or thoughts, that came from the interviews, focus groups, and fieldwork. Following the data collection, personal logging helped capture the experience as accurately as possible. Research reflections reviewed key takeaways from participant observations and any emotions that came up during that time. When possible, field observation audio was recorded in public spaces for exact transcribing. Journaling topics include the messiness of the research process, boundaries between researcher and participants, and personal thoughts on the experience.

### **Managing boundaries during data collection**

The researcher's credo "do no harm" was the top priority during data collection, yet it was often complicated and difficult to predict or manage. Narrative data collection introduced additional ethical challenges. The role of the researcher and participants were intertwined as the narrative was coproduced. Because of the intimacy generated during data collection, I felt enormous responsibility, including how much personal information to reveal, risks to take, and how best to protect the participants from additional harm. Research boundaries created before data collection ensured objectivity and lessened the risk of damage to participants. Boundaries for this study included no personal exchanges with participants unless related to the study. As the researcher, I revealed personal information about myself when it felt appropriate, but did not interfere with any events unfolding during field observations.

### **Transparency with position on capital punishment**

The topic of capital punishment presents new and unique challenges to the researcher's ethical responsibilities. Previous research shows a genuine opposition to capital punishment is ideal for studying this population (Beck & Britto, 2006; Joy, 2013). The researcher having such a bias at the onset of the study created ideological ethical issues that required deep reflection and transparency not only in the researcher's journals but also with the participants themselves. In an attempt to remain as explicit and transparent as possible, I discussed my opposition to the death penalty within the first few moments of meeting potential participants.

## **Limitations and Assumptions**

Limitations for this study are (1) subjectivity of experience, (2) honesty of participants, (3) personal bias of the researcher, and (4) assumptions. A conversation with a participant features several narratives, including my narrative as the interpreter and constructivist and the participant's narrative, which are woven tightly with their loved one's narrative on death row. With the three narratives co-occurring, the interview probes for the participant's interpretation of the micro group supporter narrative and the macro "master" narrative regarding capital punishment. Subjectivity is an interpretation of experience based on personal feelings and opinions. Individuals providing support to capital offenders are in emotional and politically charged situations. Regardless, the data remain interpretations of the researcher and participant no matter the proper categorization.

Qualitative methods bond the researcher to the data. While the data collected attempt to honestly portray participants and the population under study, beyond the general understanding of their experiences, there is no way to know if the participants exaggerated or lied during the interviews, focus group, or public events. As the researcher, my impressions and feelings will impact the data gathered, including the personal conviction that the death penalty should be abolished. This pronouncement against the death penalty is an ethical stance in response to violent punitive actions from a fallible governing body. While all research has a bias, as a death penalty abolitionist, I know that transparency on my opposition is paramount to the context of the data from this study.

The participants and the researcher share several assumptions: (1) the state should not execute their loved ones, (2) this population of supporters offers value to offenders, (3) their goals are important, (4) the obstacles presented are real, (5) loved ones of capital offenders are victims of a cruel process that causes immeasurable suffering, and (6) the death penalty should be abolished. These assumptions define participants as victims of both legal and justice processes and the cultural stigma that follows.

## **Ethical Considerations**

### **Informed Consent**

The two consent forms created for this study are for interviewees and the focus group participants (see Appendices C and D, respectively). Each session began with a review of the appropriate consent form to ensure the participants understood their rights and the nature of their involvement. The informed consent clearly explained the purpose of the study as well as the participants' right to refuse to answer any questions and right to stop participating at any time without reason. Rather than asking participants to provide their names and signatures, verbal consent was audio recorded to protect their confidentiality.

Trust is essential to the understanding and telling of their voices. For the researcher to gain this trust ethically, participants had to understand the purpose of the study and the intended use of their information. Clarity in consent is an important element in gaining trust in ethical research. This stigmatized group distrusts many around them, including the criminal justice system, their community, and sometimes even their circle of friends and family (King & Norgard, 1999; Smykla, 1987).

During the creation of the consent form, the researcher considered the unique levels of stress the topic might have on participants. With that in mind, a mental health resource guide with listings of mental health care providers was developed and given to participants (see Appendix C). Focus group participants were asked to comply with group confidentiality rules and refrain from sharing the discussion with others outside the focus group. Acknowledging such limitations explicitly encouraged potential participants to make informed decisions.

### **Data Security**

Keeping data secure was also paramount. For this reason, an extensive data security plan was developed by the Texas State Information Security Office (ISO) specifically for this study. This plan includes an official Texas State laptop with ISO-approved third-party equipment. All data were stored on Texas State's file share with IT assistance in case of equipment failure or data loss.

### **Summary**

The research questions and design for this study leveraged the strengths of qualitative methods by triangulating data from different sources and closely examining the experiences under study in order to create rich, thick descriptions. Prevention of further harm to participants during interactions that occurred through interviews and observed events was a top priority. The commitment to the data, participants, and the research community to express dedicated transparency and reflexivity was practiced throughout the study. Transparency and reflexivity were prioritized because my personal beliefs against the death penalty influenced the data collection process. For this reason,



the data collected through the reflexive journaling process were examined both separately and alongside the findings.

#### **4. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The experience of those caring for loved ones on Texas death row involves various types of care, with unique needs that vary depending on the offender and supporters. Data collected consisted of semi-structured interviews, semi-structured focus groups, and participant observations. The triangulation of methods increased the validation and context necessary for discourse analysis. The small sample size prevented theoretical saturation from occurring; however, ample data were gathered to start providing answers to the research questions. The examination of the research questions within the context of the narrative analysis factors (actants, plot descriptors, chronological periods) clarifies top themes in the form of a narrative. Participant quotes provide additional context to the themes presented.

Actants and plot descriptors were sorted by frequency in the total volume of code references found within the total sample data analyzed. Data collected were (1) interview transcripts, (2) focus group transcript, (3) field observation transcripts, and (4) event advocacy materials. Interviews and focus group data allowed for a more in-depth analysis of all supports under study, while observed events and supplemental assets allowed for greater understanding of the support network available during advocacy events held by family or friends of capital offenders.

##### **Actants**

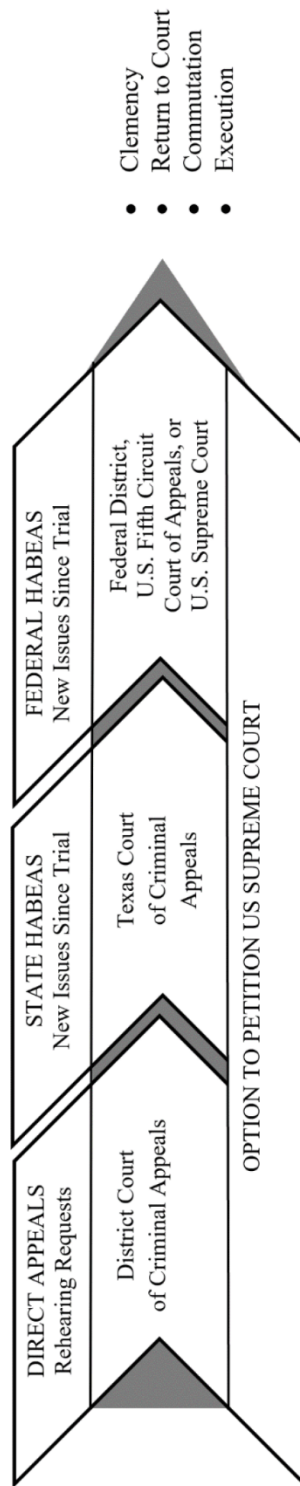
Constructed narratives included a variation of actants to allow for a greater understanding. Popular actants included individuals close to the supporter or capital offender: family, friends, and other caretakers within the network and actants found within the capital punishment process in Texas (see Table 4). These include (1) the TDCJ

system, specifically corrections and partners; (2) the Texas governor and members of the Texas Senate and House; (3) appellate courts (see Figure 1); and (4) legal resources needed for appeals, execution stays, and prisoner civil rights. Nonprofit organizations involved in abolition or prison reform were also present in the narratives.

Table 4.

*Top Actant Categories*

	Popular Actants
TDCJ and affiliates	Corrections, Polunsky, Correctional Officers, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, Warden, Ombudsman,
Individuals	Family, Friends, Capital Offender, Offender's Family Other Supporters of Capital Offenders
Legal	Appeals Process/Attorney, Court of Criminal Appeals (5 <sup>th</sup> Circuit), Legislators, Governor of Texas
Nonprofits	Religious Organizations, Activist Groups
Media	Media
Society	Society or Larger Community, Texas



#### Key Figures and Influencers

- Trial Judge
- Trial Lawyer
- Trial Jury
- Prosecutor
- Appeals Attorney
- Politicians
- Courts of Criminal Appeals
- Federal District Courts
- U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals
- Public
- U.S. Supreme Court
- Texas Governor
- Board of Pardons and Paroles
- District Attorney

Figure 1. Appeals Process and Key Figures and Influencers

## Plot Descriptors

Plot descriptors consist of feelings, characteristics, objects, and actions (see Table 5). Plot descriptors discovered in the data collected were (1) concepts that described the support provided, (2) negative impact on supporter from experience, and (3) qualities related to supporter. Popular plot descriptors related to the support provided were organizing for a cause, education related to capital punishment, visits, and pen-pal letters. Negative impact of the death penalty common plot descriptors were stigma, dehumanization, death, stress, and anger. Lastly, plot descriptors related to the supporter qualities included compassion, commitment, strength, and nonjudgment.

Table 5.

*Top Plot Descriptors Categories*

	Popular Plot Descriptors
Related to support provided	Organizing for Cause, Work, Education Related to Capital Punishment, Visits, Travel, Pen-Pal Letters, Advocacy, Witnessing
Negative impact of the death penalty on supporter	Stigma, Dehumanization, Powerlessness, Mistreatment, Death, Stress, Frustration, Anger
Qualities related to supporter	Compassion, Commitment, Nonjudgment, Inclusivity, Strength, Opportunity, Positivity, Acceptance, Humanization, Love

## Characteristics of Supporters Under Study

Characteristics of the supporters under study are strength, determination, faith, and forgiveness. Supporter values include commitment, compassion, and resisting judgment. Several supporters relate to their capital offender's needs like those of a child. "It's just one of those things. In my heart, this is my child, and I'm going to do the best that I can to take care of him" (CH1). This relationship embodies the forgiveness,

acceptance, and love capital offenders need to survive the deprivation of death row. Multiple participants recall moments when their loved ones expressed, “If you would have been my mom, I would not be here,” which validated the efforts of supporters (CH2). (For complete quotes in this section, see Appendix F.)

The characteristics of sacrifice and commitment were additional themes discovered. “I got a home equity loan to hire an investigator two different times through the lawyer. Then he was executed and that just wiped me out. One of the worst days of my life” (CH3). Supporters consistently put the needs of their loved ones on death row before their own, often in an attempt to add positivity. “I try to be as positive and upbeat towards him so he can have a positive outlook on things, too. I do have my moments where I’ll just cry. Where I’m just like, it’s hard. It doesn’t really get easier” (CH4). Despite the difficulties present, supporters projected strength as a necessity to survival. “I have my days where it’s like, is this really my life, but I don’t let it bring me down enough where I cannot go on” (CH5).

### **Chronological Periods**

The two chronological periods present in the data were (1) before an execution date is set and (2) after an execution date is set. The two time periods helped the organization of data collected because support varies between the two. To begin, the time before an execution date is set represents the majority of time their loved one spends on death row. The average time capital offenders spend on death row in Texas is 10.87 years (TDCJ, 2020).

The support provided to their capital offenders before a date is set includes regular monthly visits, pen-pal letters, money for commissary, and advocacy related to appeals or prison conditions. An execution date is scheduled up to 90 days in advance and requires unique support. Many supporters start urgent activism efforts to stop the execution. Some caretakers provide support by witnessing their loved one's execution. After the execution is complete, a few supporters offer final wishes and cremation sponsorship (see Figure 2).

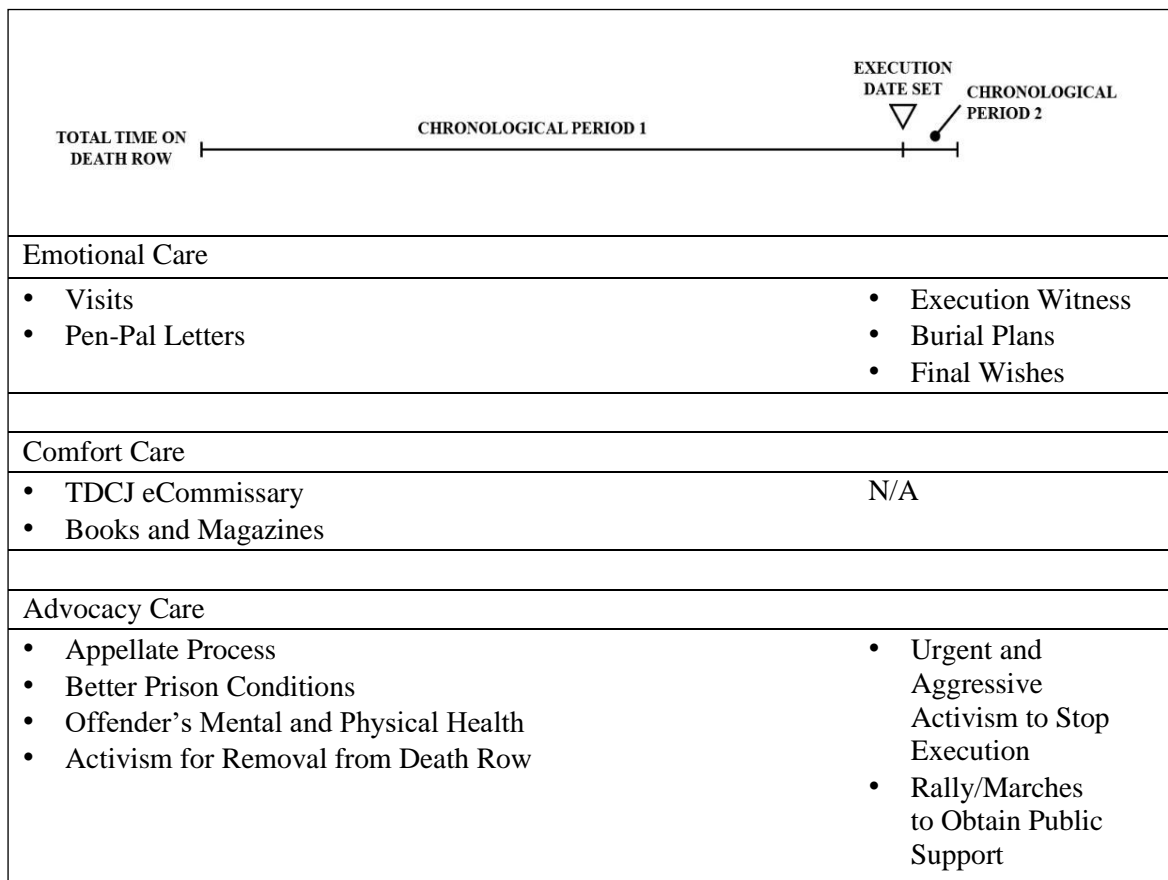


Figure 2. Chronological Periods of Before and After Execution Date is Set

**(R1) What Support Are Those Caring for Loved Ones on Texas Death Row Before and After Execution?**

The support provided by the sample of caretakers under study encompasses three groups: (1) emotional care, (2) comfort care, and (3) advocacy care (see Table 6).

Emotional care focuses on providing the offender with love, validation, and attention.

Comfort care is buying additional supplies from the TDCJ, and advocacy care revolves around speaking up on behalf of your loved one's rights while incarcerated. All three

types of care span both chronological periods, before and after the scheduled execution date. Of the three, advocacy care is the highest in frequency among the code references.

In contrast, comfort care is the least represented and considered less critical to the survival needs of loved ones. The TDCJ provides sufficient food and other necessities for inmates to survive. For this reason, supporters often prioritize visits to allow inmates time out of their cell and human connection.

Table 6.

*Most Common Support Provided for Types of Care*

Emotional Care	Comfort Care	Advocacy Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits</li> <li>• Pen-pal letters and pictures</li> <li>• Attention</li> <li>• Acceptance</li> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Nonjudgment</li> <li>• Compassion</li> <li>• Facilitation of relationship with family members</li> <li>• Execution witnessing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Money for clothes, hygiene products, food, craft supplies</li> <li>• Meals during visits</li> <li>• Maintenance and supply of allowed possessions</li> <li>• Books, magazines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal communication</li> <li>• Media outreach</li> <li>• Letters and calls for clemency or stay</li> <li>• Rally and protest organizing</li> <li>• Communication with warden or ombudsman for facility or staff issues</li> <li>• Working with legislators toward policy improvements</li> <li>• Executor of body and possessions</li> <li>• Burial arrangements</li> </ul>



### **(R1.1) Emotional Care**

Emotional care is paramount to the care provided by supporters of loved ones on Texas death row. At its core, emotional care validates the existence of the offender on death row not only with visits and letters but also through acceptance, nonjudgment, inclusivity, and compassion. This commitment on behalf of the caretakers helps the offender manage depression, find new friends, and connect with additional family members. Many supporters speak to the need of their loved ones to know they are loved, missed, and supported on the outside, confirming emotional care as critical to the survival of their loved ones' time on Texas death row.

Acceptance and nonjudgment are foundations of the emotional care provided by participants. Some supporters who have met their loved one since their incarceration on Texas death row are unaware of the specifics and have not discussed the crime they committed for the duration of their relationship, "I look at them as human beings; I look at them as friends. I don't think about what they did in the past because people do change" (E1). (For complete quotes in this section, see Appendix G.)

Another component of emotional care for some is spiritual. Spiritual guidance helps capital offenders and caretakers manage the impending execution. "My main purpose of supporting them is giving them the things that they need to be able to live out what they're living, and then should they come to the end, to execution, that they know where they're going" (E2). Spiritual guidance consists of prayer, reading the spiritual text together, religious communion, and fellowship. "We do have a communion. We'll do bread, a cracker, and we'll drink grape juice, and we'll say a prayer and do the holy communion together" (E3).

Visits are the most frequent code associated with emotional care. Visits allow the capital offender time to bond with loved ones and time out of their cells, where they are in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day. Inmates are allowed 10 preapproved visitors on their list, with two hours for visits every week. TDCJ allows visitors from out of the area extended visits of four hours (TDCJ, 2019). Visits break the isolation of solitary and permit conversation between the capital offender and a loved one, “Knowing that I'm here and knowing that I'm with him, that's his kind of happy time” (E4).

Many caretakers use visits as an essential way of expressing their love and dedication despite the travel, cost, and stress (E5). As emotional care is essential for the mental health of capital offenders, supporters often offer visits to other capital offenders who have no visitors (E6). Visits allow caretakers and offenders to bond through conversation, with food available for purchase in nearby vending machines. This exchange allows members of this community to treat their loved ones to healthier meal options, or favorite snacks not available on death row. Several interviewees recalled the process of purchasing food and drinks as gifts positively (E7).

Communication by mail is also an essential part of emotional care. Supporters send cards to celebrate holidays and birthday, along with personal documents weekly. Some relationships result in several hundreds of letters over the years. These messages are treasured items to both capital offenders and supporters, “I'll get maybe nine or ten a week. He loves his mail. So, I just write, ‘I love you, miss you.’ Just tell him what I've done and things like that” (E8). Supporters send images from their life as a way of connecting the capital offender(s) to the outside world. “I send them a lot of pictures. My

friends, my world. They want to use my eyes so they can see what they're missing on the outside” (E9).

**(R1.1.1) Emotional care after execution date is scheduled.** After a death warrant is issued, emotional care is relatively consistent with the care provided throughout the time spent on Texas death row. The difference in emotional care required by supporters is the emotional support provided through the execution. Witnessing the execution of a loved one is the last opportunity to provide care before the death of their loved one.

I tell him, “I want you to know my feelings about you dying alone. I don’t like it. I would like to be there with you so that you can see me. I think it would bring comfort to you to see me.” Sometimes they’ll say, “Oh, but I didn’t want to put you through that.” I said, “I’m okay. I’m not okay with what they’re doing to you, but I’m okay being there. And I want you to be able to see me tell you I love you before you go out of this world” (E10).

The arrangement varies depending on the preferences of the supporter and capital offender. Ultimately, it is the capital offender who can request witnesses.

While witnessing is a difficult process that takes a toll on the supporter, the comfort provided in this period is critical to the emotional care necessary when supporting a loved one through an execution. “I got into that room, the officer said, ‘Get close to the window so he can see you.’ I was shocked. I am so glad that I came for him, so he wasn’t alone” (E11). Regardless of how the execution unfolds, supporters’ commitment to their loved ones during this time supersedes their fears or reservations. “He died very rough, but he wanted us there. And we were there. And that was his refuge

that we were there” (E12). Irrespective of the chronological period, emotional care is essential to the care provided by supporters of capital offenders. Emotional care represents the essence of the relationship between supporter and capital offender and speaks to the love shared between the two.

### **(R1.2) Comfort Care**

Comfort care often takes the form of money provided from supporters to the capital offender through systems available by the TDCJ at the Polunsky Unit. Located in Livingston, Texas, Polunsky provides capital offenders with three meals a day, some hygiene products, and prison jumpsuits. Caretakers provide a monthly stipend through the TDCJ eCommDirect Offender Direct Purchase Program (eComm). Here they can provide funds for additional items needed for more comfort on Texas death row: “If we don’t send money to him, people literally have nothing” (C1). (To view complete comfort care quotes, see Appendix H.)

Participants fluctuate on the degree of comfort support provided from nothing to the maximum amount allowed through TDCJ. Support appears to vary depending on the financial situation of the support provider. While their loved one has the essentials to live on Texas death row (i.e., food, water, and shelter), most necessities come at a cost, “and that burden really is passed on to the family if they have family that’s supporting them” (C1).

Comfort care allows supporters capable of providing money the ability to control some areas of their loved one’s life. “I want him to live his life, just as if he were out here. To be comfortable, to be able to eat well, and sleep well” (C2). Supporters can add to the limited prison diet with a variety of new foods: “Prison food is disgusting. I want to

make sure he eats” (C3) and “Let me tell you what happened this week. He told me there was [*sic*] maggots in the food and the chicken. So, they didn’t get their dinner to [*sic*] after 8:00” (C4). New prison clothes can be purchased, along with hobby materials that keep the capital offender occupied, such as typewriters, radios, art, and writing supplies. One caretaker relays, “It’s more my pride as his wife, wanting to make sure that he’s looked after. So, it’s all good. I kind of enjoy doing it in a way” (C5).

### **(R1.3) Advocacy Care**

Advocacy care is provided by members of this community to protect the rights of their loved ones living on Texas death row. During chronological period one, before an execution date is set, advocacy care focuses on calling attention to prison conditions, policy reform, or capital punishment abolition; communicating with legal actants during the appeals process; and utilizing the media to promote the needs of family and capital offenders. Advocacy within the Polunsky Unit centers on adequate living conditions, treatment, and medical care. The supporter’s voice found within advocacy care is the capital offender’s leading outlet for resolving issues of improper care or abuse.

Texas Death row inmates are housed in unairconditioned cells with required water service daily, yet this does not always happen. Neglect for proper hydration in hotter than 100 °F weather worries and angers caretakers concerned for their loved ones. “He’s not getting the cold water, and I want to think if you don’t have enough people, then get the goddamn people out here and get them the water!” (A1). (To view complete advocacy quotes, see Appendix I.) Other issues of physical neglect include the lack of proper healthcare available to death row prisoners:

The health department for the whole thing sucks. So, he was bleeding out his backside, to be quite politically correct, for almost two years. And they didn't do anything but give him freaking saltwater to gargle. What does that have to do with bleeding out of your anus? I just don't understand it (A2).

Another frustration of supporters regarding prison conditions is related to indifferent and slow prison support services. “They’re supposed to take about a month, six weeks maximum, to sort agreements, and this went on for nearly three months” (A3).

Policy reform is another crucial factor in advocacy care. Legislative sessions and the annual meeting of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles offer some opportunity for members of the community to advocate for their loved ones. These include lobbying for bills related to the abolishment of the death penalty and expressing concerns on behalf of their loved ones incarcerated and under TDCJ care. “I drive to places that I know to go and speak with them at their offices, saying, ‘Look, this is crunch time. I really need your support on that’” (A4).

Support providers also advocate for better emotional care from the offender’s family or friends. This process includes providing transportation and lodging for visits and outreach initiatives. Supporters lend their efforts as conduits to the outside for their loved ones on Texas death row.

I said, “Y’all need to think about your brother and what he’s going through. Y’all, we have our lives, and we did not put him on death row. Their mistakes put them on death row, but you need to be behind your family” (A5).

Advocacy for additional support from family and friends benefits not only the capital offender but also the supporter by reducing the supporter's stress of providing emotional and comfort care alone.

**(R1.3.1) Advocacy care after the execution date is set.** After an execution is scheduled, advocacy efforts kick into high gear during chronological period two. Once appeals are exhausted, caretakers can receive an execution date for a loved one on Texas death row at any moment. When the prosecuting district attorney issues a death warrant, capital offenders have 90 days or fewer before the execution. Supporters amp up advocacy care in two critical ways: (1) conducting activist campaigning to stop the execution of their loved one and (2) providing executor management after death.

Some participants provide activism to prevent the execution of their loved one. A campaign to stop an execution requires committed activism, along with intensified stress and emotional instability. "I was on the computer over 20 hours a day, writing anybody and everybody that I could get ahold of" (A7). Advocacy to stop the execution includes organizing marches, working the media circuit, and attempting to leverage critical influencers capable of stopping the impending death (see Figure 1). The family-led FreeRodneyReed campaign illustrates advocacy strategies utilized by those who care for loved ones on Texas death row.

TDCJ acts as the executor if no one is available to take on the responsibilities. State accommodations include a viewing in a local Baptist church for 15 minutes following the execution and burial in the Captain Joe Byrd Cemetery with the inmate number as the marker. Some caretakers offer other options for capital offenders:

When they get their dates, I said, “Well, now we need to talk about what do you want to do with your remains. Do you want them cremated? Because we have a cremation fund also that we have set up that I put \$100 a month into the cremation fund” (A6). The Walls Unit provides supporters with their loved ones’ items and instructions on the next steps for TDCJ funeral and burial events.

### **The Reed Family Campaign to FreeRodneyReed**

The Reed family experience is an ideal example of the possible support available to those with loved ones on Texas death row. After the Bastrop County district attorney requested an execution date for Rodney Reed, many actants went into play to stop the execution (Texas v. Reed, 2019). The Reed family scheduled “Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the Execution!” on September 21, 2019, and kicked off the FreeRodneyReed campaign. Led by Rodrick Reed, Rodney’s brother, the Reed Justice Initiative managed all events scheduled for the FreeRodneyReed campaign. The Reed Justice Initiative is a nonprofit organization established by the Reed family after 20 years of providing advocate care for their son and brother on death row, Rodney Reed.

Attendees were updated on the current status of the Reed case and plans moving forward by main Reed supporters (actants), including Rodney Reed’s appellate attorney from the Innocence Project, other supporters of capital offenders, exonerees, individual and group activists, public servants, and religious leaders. The Reed family’s national campaign for a stay or stop of the execution, and a new trial based on recently gathered support and evidence, with the ultimate goal being exoneration, were underway.

Sandra, mother to Rodney, Rodrick, and Wana, Rodrick’s wife, spearheaded most of the efforts. Mother Sandra spoke out on the injustices the family has experienced: “I



was meant for the world to know what they have done to my son” (A8). Brother Rodrick’s sheer determination fueled their activism. “We have goals. We have not met those needs, but even if I don’t meet the needs, you understand me, I’m getting to where I need to go” (A9).

The rally also updated Reed advocates on the schedule of upcoming campaign events. Lily Hughes addressed the crowd to inform them of campaign needs and best practices on social media: “We really want to drive people to pay attention to the forensic evidence in this case... talking about this case as much as possible, on their Twitter, on their Instagram, on their Facebook, whatever it is” (A10). The events planned for the FreeRodneyReed campaign consisted of movie screenings, vigils, television shows, media interviews, protests, rallies, marches, and meetings with top diplomats and celebrity activists. The support gathered by this initiative was central to the historic success of the FreeRodneyReed campaign, and it illustrated the potential support available to members of the community during the weeks leading up to a possible execution.

### **(R2) Top Supporter Needs, Related (R3) Obstacles, and (R4) Support Obtained**

Top needs discovered from data collection included (1) the removal of the loved one from death row, (2) skilled appellate representation, (3) legislation related to removal from death row in Texas, (4) funding for care, (5) assistance from the offender’s family and friends, (6) voice amplification, (7) unbiased media coverage, (8) public support, (9) mental health and emotional support, (10) better prison conditions, (11) fair legal/justice state officials and processes, and (12) public education on capital punishment. Most themes connected to the supporter’s needs, obstacles, and assistance obtained fall under

advocacy care. Some requirements, like prison conditions or funding for care, also link to emotional and comfort care.

Caretakers are constrained in their ability to influence legal or criminal justice actants related to their loved ones' incarcerations and impending executions. Due to this, extensive support networks are established with varied influencers to combat TDCJ, as well as any legal and legislative obstacles pertinent to the needs of the care providers. Table 7 displays the relationship between obstacles and support obtained for each significant need discovered.

The paramount need, without question, is the removal of their loved ones from death row, followed by needs associated with easing the discomfort in their loved ones experiences. Additional funds would help this population of supporters immensely by removing some of the financial burden their role presents. Public support would help funding deficits, abolition legislation, and social stigma reduction by embracing the amplification of the supporters' voices. Voice amplification empowers supporters to combat state officials or processes that impact this population in devastating ways. The needs of supporters are often the same as the needs of their loved ones on death row. The most urgent need for this population is the removal of their loved ones from death row. While the appellate case might not be their own, the outcome has an incredible impact on both the supporter and offender. For this reason, many needs link to the advocacy efforts related to removing their loved ones from death.

Table 7.

*Major Supporter Needs (R2), Obstacles (R3), and Support Obtained (R4)*

R2.1	Removal of Loved One From Death Row
R3.1	Main obstacles: money, incompetent counsel, lack of voice.
R4.1	Support obtained: TDCJ, legal actants, media, activist organizations.
R2.2	Engaged and Skilled Appellate Representation
R3.2	Main obstacles: death penalty statutes, lack of influence, society/larger community.
R4.2	Support obtained: legislators, public support, other supporters of capital offenders, nonprofit organizations.
R2.3	Legislation Related to Removal From Death Row in Texas
R3.3	Main obstacles: lack of influence, powerlessness, money, incompetent counsel.
R4.3	Support obtained: media, nonprofit organizations, legal actants.
R2.4	Funding for Care
R3.4	Main obstacles: lack of influence, powerlessness, money, incompetent counsel.
R4.4	Support obtained: media, nonprofit organizations, legal actants.
R2.5	Support Assistance From Offender Family and Friends
R3.5	Main obstacles: travel, money, family, friends, stress, death, disinterest, abandonment.
R4.5	Support obtained: self, other supporters of capital offenders.
R2.6	Voice Amplification
R3.6	Main obstacles: money, lack of influence, lack of supporters.
R4.6	Support obtained: activist, family, friends, society/larger community, legislators, legal/justice state officials, academic research.
R2.7	Unbiased Media Coverage
R3.7	Main obstacles: lack of influence, stigma related to death row, society/larger community “morbidity curiosity.”
R4.7	Support obtained: journalists, activists, other supporters of capital offenders.
R2.8	Public Support
R3.8	Main obstacles: stigma, lack of supporters, lack of influence, society/larger community.

Table 7. Continued

R4.8	Support obtained: self, family, friends, other supporters of capital offenders, society/larger community, nonprofit organizations.
R2.9	Mental Health and Emotional Support
R3.9	Main obstacles: lack of supporters, family, friends, society/larger community, stigma, trauma, stress, emotional suffering.
R4.9	Support obtained: offender, family, friends, other supporters of capital offenders, God, religious organizations, love, visits, validation, social media.
R2.10	Better Prison Conditions
R3.10	Main obstacles: Polunsky Unit, lack of influence, neglect, TDCJ, warden, ombudsman, corrections, money.
R4.10	Support obtained: TDCJ, legal actants, legislators, activist organizations, academic research.
R2.11	Fair State Justice Officials and Processes
R3.11	Main obstacles: Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, Texas governor, legislators, unfair/unjust process, TDCJ, warden, ombudsman.
R4.11	Support obtained: TDCJ, legal actants, activist organizations, academic research.
R2.12	Public Education on Capital Punishment
R3.12	Main obstacles: rejection, ignorance regarding Texas death penalty, stigma, emotional abuse, society/larger community, media.
R4.12	Support obtained: key influencers, other supporters of capital offenders, society/larger community, social media, activist organizations, religious organizations, academia.

### **(R2.1) Removal of Loved One From Death Row and (R3.1) Related Obstacles**

Removing the offender from death row makes up a large portion of the advocacy care provided by supporters. Capital offenders can be removed from death row in three ways: (1) abolishment, (2) clemency or commutation, and (3) exoneration (see Figure 1). All four actions follow strict legal procedures with specific actants in power: legislators, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP), Texas governor, district attorney, appellate attorney, Texas courts, Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court. As legal processes, laws that apply to capital punishment are vital to the need for removal.

### **(R2.2) Engaged and Skilled Appellate Representation and (R3.2) Related Obstacles**

All channels for removal from death row require legal representation. Supporters of capital offenders have little influence over the procedures and their outcomes. Obstacles to this necessity are money, incompetent appellate counsel, and lack of influence (R3.2). Caretakers depend heavily on skilled appellate counsel for a fair and just hearing or trial: “He was denied last week at the Supreme Court, for what I don’t know because he has horrible lawyers that don’t tell us anything” (N1). (For complete quotes in this section, see Appendix H).

Obtaining expert appellate representation throughout the numerous appeals, however, creates unsurmountable obstacles for many interviewed in this study.

We can’t hire an attorney. They’re not allowed to pick who their attorney is unless they find someone that’s willing to pick up their case and then petition the court and if the court agrees... which we tried to do. I found someone that was willing to take his case. And he’s really amazing and has gotten people off of death row. So, he petitioned the court, and the judge denied it (N2).

For others who feel trapped by their loved ones' counsel, money becomes a substantial obstacle to obtaining skilled appellate attorneys: "We're not in a financial position where we can pick up and find new lawyers. They want a \$3 million retainer because they know what kind of work that they're going to do" (N3).

**(R4.2) Support obtained by engaged and skilled appellate representation.**

One third of the interviewees spoke highly of their loved one's appellate representation. The majority of those were being represented by the esteemed Innocence Project, a nonprofit legal firm that seeks to exonerate innocent death row offenders through DNA testing and determined litigation (N4). Others interviewed were also pleased with their assigned attorney due to excellent communication, nonjudgment, and commitment to the same cause: keeping their loved one from being executed (N2).

**(R2.3) Legislation Related to Removal and (R3.3) Related Obstacles**

Several interviewees worked with legislators to abolish the death penalty and remove the "law of parties" from state law. Significant obstacles to this need are unresponsive or pro-death penalty legislators in the Texas Senate and House, lack of public support to help pressure legislators toward more restorative methods, and, finally, the statutes themselves, which are buried deep in the retributive culture in Texas criminal justice (R3.3). Texas abolishment bills submitted in 2018 and 2019 are Texas Senate Bill (S.B.) 294 and House Bills (H.B.) 246 and (H.B.) 336. These proposals aim to remove death as an option for sentencing in Penal Code Section 12.31. An example from S.B. 294 suggests the following language be removed: "in a case in which the state seeks the death penalty shall be punished by imprisonment in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for life without parole or by death" (S.B. 294, Sec. 12.31, 2019).

Another primary legislative focus for some supporters is to end the “law of parties.” The Texas Code of Criminal Procedure permits juries to consider the “law of parties” during sentencing deliberation. “Whether the defendant actually engaged in the conduct prohibited or did not . . . but intended that the offense be committed against the victim or another intended victim” (Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Art. 37.071, 2019). Texas Senate Bill (S.B.) 929 and House Bill (H.B.) 4113 seek to remove the death penalty for those charged on the statute of “law of parties,” while H.B. 4113 would repeal and dismiss future death sentences for those convicted under the “law of parties.” For those caring for offenders convicted of capital murder by the “law of parties,” removing this statute would also mean the removal of their loved ones from Texas death row. For participants seeking legislator support, most shared frustrations with hard-to-engage legislators (N5).

#### **(R4.3) Support Obtained in the Form of Legislation Related to the Removal of Their Loved One from Death Row in Texas**

Support for legislation related to the death penalty in Texas includes bills on abolition, ending the controversial “law of parties,” and increased protection for the mentally ill or disabled. Many actants found as support are also present in the obstacles related to the death penalty (R3.3). Public support encourages politicians to engage, amplifying the voice of supporters of capital offenders and empowering this population of activists:

In the initial letter we got from the representatives, there were 17 that signed on in support. That was sent to the pardons and parole board. We’ve gotten over 10,000 petition signatures, just going to different places, talking to different people about

the case, about the “law of parties” because people don’t know that you can be executed for something that somebody else did (N6).

While these caretakers find garnering support for legislation problematic, amending current statutes depends on them. The success of capital punishment legislation requires backing by key influencers like legislators and officials in the TDCJ system. For example, Elsa Alcala, retired Texas Court of Criminal Appeals judge, testified in defense of abolishing the death penalty and the “law of parties” (N7). Having such an admired and qualified member of the justice system back the initiatives of this population of supporters offers validation and credibility to their efforts.

#### **(R2.4) Funding for Care and (R3.4) Related Obstacles**

A considerable obstacle for family and friends of capital offenders is money. The financial burden on supporters of capital offenders is substantial and creates many additional barriers, including travel, providing essentials for their loved one, engaging key influencers, and educating the public on the Texas death penalty. Participants spend from zero dollars to \$1,000 a month on supporting their loved one on death row: “It’s about \$1,000 per month that includes visits, food, books or magazines or sending him commissary money on his books, going to visit, buying the lunch meals, and then gas” (C2).

High costs related to the emotional and comfort care provided by supporters resulted from insufficient hygiene supplies and food items provided by TDCJ at the Polunsky Unit: “He has to pay for his own soap. You’ve got to pay for extra food; he’s got to pay for paper. He has to pay for a pencil; you’ve got to pay. People think it is given to them” (C1). One participant who has been supporting their brother for over two



decades stated, “I added it up, and it was over \$200,000 at one time for supporting him” (N8). To fund these needs, some supporters take on second or third jobs. “I work a lot. Three jobs. My third job basically goes to the death row” (N9).

Travel to the Polunsky Unit, which is in Livingston, Texas, is another critical barrier to providing support. As stated earlier, visits provide emotional care to offenders and are essential to their mental health. The bulk of supporters of Texas capital offenders live two or more hours away in the major cities of Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin:

I would love to visit him more than I do. But we’re talking like four and a half to five hours if there is zero traffic, and I’m driving at nighttime in the middle of the night, and then it’s the hotel room. You know what I’m saying? This is always a huge financial issue. Then you have to get a hotel room unless you drive up there and back on one day, and then you’re gone for 20 hours of the day (N10).

The commitment to visiting the Polunsky Unit is substantial, with many describing challenges related to the extensive time needed to travel, including requiring supporters to take time off from the work desperately needed to fund their support efforts. “You better take the day off if you’re going to go make [*sic*] a visit” (N11).

Advocacy efforts also require funding, especially activist-oriented efforts related to the removal of loved ones from death row and educating the public through speaking engagements, attending anti-death penalty events, and hosting family rallies or petition campaigns.

It’s a struggle sometimes, especially if you don’t have the money to go out and rally all the time or if you don’t have the money to go out and you know, deliver

those letters or if you don't have the money to go protest or whatever. It's, it's hard. This whole thing is so hard, but it's worth it (N12).

**(R4.4) Support obtained for funding care.** Most funding for care comes from the leading supporter and other supporters of their loved one, including other family and friends and religious and activist organizations. "His dad sends money. Not much, but it all helps" (C5). Another interviewee stated, "His mom helps out a lot. Sometimes I'll do \$100, and she'll do \$100" (C3). Supporters will ask for help paying for eComm or sending letters to their incarcerated loved ones by posting requests on Facebook. More often, the financial relief comes in the form of volunteer care services from other supporters such as supplemental visits and assistance with travel (carpooling, hosting, airport pick-up). This network of exchanging emotional, comfort, and advocacy care bonds supporters to one another as they also become friends with one another's capital offenders.

#### **(R2.5) Support Assistance From Offender Family and Friends and Related Obstacles**

All participants who visit loved ones on Texas death row spoke of the need for assistance in providing care (R3.5). Obstacles to gaining extra support from the offender family and friends are money, travel, stress, death, and disinterest or abandonment. Numerous capital offenders on Texas death row do not have an active supporter providing care. When the driver of support ceases to provide care, those willing to dedicate themselves to the task are hard to find. "When she was alive, she would make them (siblings) take her to see her son. When she died, they totally abandoned him" (N13). Another participant stated the following:

We know a lot of guys that don't get food and don't get commissary and never get anything put on their accounts. And we have other inmates that will tell us like, Hey, can y'all please help...? His mom hasn't put anything on his books in the last three months, and he's hungry. She died (N14).

Several capital offenders have stressed relations with their loved ones, also decreasing the support available to them. Other family and friends struggle with the commitment to travel and the financial burden of providing comfort care. "No liquid assets. She's paying her doctor bills and paying this, paying that. She don't [*sic*] have any money to pay him. I'm sorry. That's just the fact of life" (N15).

#### **(R2.6) Voice Amplification and (R3.6) Related Obstacles**

Voice amplification and advocacy by others are also vital needs for caretakers of capital offenders. To address the stigma, greater understanding by surrounding communities is necessary. Key influencers advocating for social acceptance and respect toward supporters of capital offenders open new opportunities for this population's voice to be heard. Anthony Graves, a Texas exoneree and activist, had this advice for the attendees of the Rodney Reed family rally:

How do our voices be [*sic*] heard? Everybody in here has a story. How does it become heard? Because that's what's going to change the system. Personal stories that have been directly affected by the criminal justice system moves this ball (N16).

Obstacles related to the supporter voice amplification include media, lack of funding, lack of public support, and the existing harsh stigma placed on this population of caretakers (R3.6).

**(R4.6) Support obtained in the form of voice amplification of the supporters' needs.** Gloria Rubac, who has been protesting executions in Huntsville for the last 20 years, leads the execution protests by standing front and center, with generous use of her megaphone to admonish political leaders and the TDCJ. Rubac also amplifies the voices of executed offenders and supporters. She represents the voice of the protestors and often speaks to the condemned offender strapped down in the execution chamber approximately 100 ft away. At times, family members speak directly to their loved one in the death house or to their family walking in to witness the execution on Rubac's megaphone:

Cousin to the executed: "You said he can hear if we speak on the megaphone?"

Rubac: "Uh, huh. You want to talk?"

Cousin on megaphone: "[Name removed], this is your cousin [name removed].

Everybody in Fort Worth, everybody in Oklahoma. We love you. We'll see you, and if God say so, you're not going nowhere [*sic*]. We pray for you, we love you.

You are not here by yourself; we are with you. We love you (crying)" (N17).

Death row exonerees are also great champions of supporters and other capital offenders. By speaking about their experiences and the damages suffered during the process, exonerees offer incredible insight into the extent of the impact of capital punishment on their communities. During the Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed, Anthony Graves stated the following:

You don't have to sit on death row to have a story. This beautiful woman has a story (referring to Sandra Reed). Her son is sitting on death row. And she's been

there with him ever since. The world needs to know that the media needs to know, the politician needs to know that. (Anthony Graves, N18).

As previously stated, the voices of supporters and their capital offenders are often ignored. Amplifying the voices of those living the tortured experience is vital to gaining the public support necessary to help push the supporter's collective needs forward.

### **(R2.7) Unbiased Media Coverage and (R3.7) Related Obstacles**

For members of this community, leveraging the media to amplify their voice is risky. Obstacles to gaining unbiased media are lack of influence, the stigma related to death row, and true-crime culture, turning horrible realities into entertainment viewing for society's "morbid curiosity."

They (media) do that on purpose to make them look like monsters, and people go "Killer! Killer! Killer! He's a monster, he should be killed!" I can't even tell you how many times I've heard that term and I hate it, because of all of my brothers he is the most kind-hearted and would do *anything* for *anybody*. He's one of the best people I know (N19).

While the media is the best platform for reaching the public to garner support, many caretakers experience conflict over whether to engage the media to amplify their voice:

We did exactly what our lawyers told us to do. Don't talk to anybody. Go there, visit him. Keep your head down. Don't cause problems and leave. So, we just stayed quiet. We refuse all media because we were told to do that. And it turned out to be the worst thing for us (N20).

Another participant speaks to the optics related to being seen on death row and how it might impact their loved one's chances to be removed from death row. "I'm frustrated because I want the legal side to see the person that I know. So, I don't want them to see the Forensic Files side" (N21). The difficulties related to humanizing capital offenders also add to the fear of the media exploiting the public's "morbid curiosity" regarding death row inmates. Despite attempts to present their loved ones as humans and not "circus freaks," the media at times fosters the stigma that debilitates many supporters (N22). For some, the rejection and shame perpetrated are too much: "She tried to kill herself at that point in time because the news is convicted killer, and your father is a murderer and he's gonna murder my family and he should die! It's really that bad" (N23).

**(R4.7) Support obtained in the form of unbiased media coverage.** Caretakers of loved ones on Texas death row cannot control the media and the dissemination of information. When the media is leveraged, however, a broadcast backed by key influencers with reputable backgrounds allows for a more significant impact to amplify the supporter's message. An essential component to gaining unbiased media for this community is Houston's The Prison Show. Every Friday night, listeners (many death row inmates) tune in to KPFT 90.1 to hear the national and local capital punishment news. Steadfast execution protestors The Death Row Angels of Texas moderate much of the two-hour show, lending credibility to the intent of content presented. As one participant stated, "The idea is to give them a radio, so they can at least hear . . . everything that's going on" (N24).

The Prison Show hosts various criminal justice experts reviewing new case law updates or justice reformers. "Keri Blakinger, who's a Houston Chronicle reporter, does a

lot of the reporting from TDCJ and the wrong that TDCJ does” (N25). Other timeslots include shout-outs to incarcerated Texas inmates and various charity services available to all Texas inmates.

### **(R2.8) Public Support and (R3.8) Related Obstacles**

With ample public support, those caring for capital offenders could resolve most of their needs. Top obstacles related to public support include stigma, lack of supporters, lack of influence, and society or surrounding communities. The stigma discovered during this study includes the belief that capital offenders are evil and, therefore, not worthy of life. Therefore, those who choose to love capital offenders must also be bad in some way. These beliefs have significant consequences for the caretakers of capital offenders, including social subjugation as punishment for loving a “monster.” Sharp (2005) describes this population’s vulnerability as a “target of media coverage and retaliatory actions” (p. 71). One participant stated, “This is the life where if you kind of want negativity and rudeness, this is what you get. You’ve picked the life for it. To be honest” (N26). Another interviewee stated, “I think it’s just the whole death row thing because they’re like, ‘Oh, my God, he must be a monster!’ And then I’m just like, ‘No he’s not. He’s a human... he’s nice’” (N27).

The families of those accused of the crimes, however, have few places to turn for support. They are left to deal with their grief alone, often losing the support of friends, extended family, and community organizations. When asked if they feel supported by their community, the majority of participants describe rejection, suffering, and abuse caused by stigma. One participant stated the following:

We get hate mail. I can't even tell you about all the hate mail that we get, especially when he's on the news quite a bit. So, letters will come in all kinds of messages on Facebook, "fry him," "motherfucker needs to be . . .," you know? And it goes on and on and on and on and on, and "his family must be pieces of shit for him to have turned out that way." I mean, I've heard it all. It's just so much emotional abuse for us from hateful people around the world (N29).

Others would describe a general disgust, confusion, and then retreat from the relationship as a form of distancing themselves from the supporter's situation. "I'll tell my friends. They're like, 'Ummmmm, no.' Some people I'll text one day, and I haven't heard back from them yet, and that's years ago" (N30). She continued with the following: "People think I'm putting my life on hold because of him. I'm just doing everything I wouldn't [*sic*] be doing any other time. I'm working. I'm doing what I want. My life's not on hold on. I'm fine" (N31).

The stigma experienced by caretakers interviewed often extends to their family or friends, especially if introduced to the capital offender after sentencing. Of all the interview and focus group (n=13) participants, nine met their loved ones after sentencing. Of those nine participants, wives and friends struggle the most with family or friend rejection. All wives interviewed shared stories of rejection from family. One participant described her father as "quite judgmental" and "the type of person who has boxes." After explaining her love for a Texas death row inmate, her father responded, "I don't know what you're doing. I can't understand it. I need to distance myself from the whole situation." That would be the last time she saw her father. She explains, "If you don't fit into those boxes, then he doesn't want to know" (N32). Another wife spoke of family



objection and rejection in the form of avoidance. “They don’t really ask about him. When I bring him up, they just kind of change the subject.” Later, she added, “Just my immediate family knows. My mom told me not to tell my other family” (N33, N34).

**(R4.8) Public support obtained.** Public support garnered by loved ones caring for capital offenders varies among legal professionals, officials in the TDCJ, family, friends, and religious and nonprofit organizations. Requirements include educating the public on capital punishment in Texas, voice amplification, and advocacy by key influencers. Activist and exoneree Anthony Graves gave an inspiring speech during the Reed family rally, energizing the Reed support network to keep pushing for Rodney’s life:

We have to continue this momentum. You have to keep this in their face. You have to let them know that they’re not going to win. You cannot just tell us go sit down that you got this. No, no, no, no. You got this? We got this! (N35).

Rally cries like this are just one example of ways this community of supporters lifts one another.

During the 20th Annual March to Abolish the Death Penalty, prosecutor and district attorney candidate for Travis County Jose Garza was heralded as the first district attorney, or running district attorney, to speak at the annual march in 20 years. During his speech, Garza described the poor mental states of three death row prisoners: “These stories are hard to talk about and even harder to hear. We have a responsibility to talk about them, and we have a responsibility to listen to them” (N36).

Another important channel for access to public support is through churches and other religious groups.

At that time, the death penalty was really not spoken of very much. I asked if I could come and speak . . . about my family's case, and he (priest) allowed me to come to each one of the masses on several occasions and talk. So, we have generations of people that are praying for him, and then they send it to the prayer meetings and their different groups (N37).

The aid of influential actants and opportunities to educate the public require many channels to amplify the voice of the caretakers under study.

While the stigma is prevalent, several participants described a shift in cultural perspectives on capital offenders and their loved ones. One interviewee from a rural community in Texas stated, "What I noticed is like a lot of the younger people, the millennials and Generation X, they're interested. The older people are set in their ways" (N38). Another participant from an urban area stated, "I want to say the whole picture is changing. There's people that don't want to have that. They don't want executions going on in Texas" (N39).

### **(R2.9) Mental Health and Emotional Support and (R3.9) Related Obstacles**

Supporters of capital offenders experience substantial trauma, including emotional suffering, stress, and exhaustion. "We really do need emotional counselors. We're also victims of the whole system, and the children have it just as bad as we do. We're considered monsters just like they are" (N40). As stated earlier, caretakers of capital offenders endure a complicated grieving process, the stress of an impending execution, and societal stigma (Beck et al., 2007; Beck & Britto, 2006; Bessler, 2019; Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Sharp, 2005). Currently, there is still little support available for members of this community to assist in their unique set of emotional

and mental health requirements. Needs include emotional support from friends and family and the development of more professional mental health services. Obstacles encompass rejection from family, friends, and society or larger community due to stigma. The consequences of such rejection induce further trauma, stress, and emotional suffering.

The process of executing an offender in Texas is a long one with many cycles of appeals. The average length of time spent on death row in Texas is 10.87 years (TDCJ, 2019). Due to this, many supporters spend one or more decades caring for a loved one sentenced to death. After 21 years of support, one participant states, “It all takes time, and it all takes money, and it all takes strength. That, I think I’m losing. I’m just worn out” (N41). She then described the constant chaos and instability of the process:

I’m getting ready to go to work, and it was 5:30 in the morning. I see, “It’s so sad that [name removed] was denied in the Supreme Court again,” and I’m just like, “Whaaaat???” Right then and there, I’m pounding the keys to talk to the lawyers, “What in the world is going on? How come you didn’t tell us anything? What did you even file?” Nothing. We know nothing (N42).

The stress leads many to heightened anxiety and exhaustion, which compounds as the years go on.

The experience of providing emotional care in chronological period two, specifically through execution, elevates their emotional suffering. Participants who discussed witnessing an execution expressed duress and trauma related to the experience. Regardless of the terminology on the death certificate, homicide versus judicial execution (H.B. 93, 2005), the impact on family and friends cannot be understated.

Getting him through execution is very, very hard on me. He didn't want me to be a witness. (crying) And I told him, I said, "I don't know what that experience is because I've never been a witness, but the only thing I do know is I can't let you die by yourself" (N43).

One participant would describe the distress of watching their loved one appear to suffocate to death during the execution. "That was really hard on me. That's when I had nightmares for several nights. Every time I go to sleep, I would see him struggling" (N44).

All the capital offenders at the center of the four execution protests attended had the possibility of a stay within minutes of the scheduled execution. Others would describe the torment of saying last goodbyes repeatedly:

It's a horrible experience, and it doesn't mean that they're going to die because they can always have a stay . . . if they give them a stay so that they get another date . . . that's torture. That is torture because you go through the last visit . . . and then a few weeks later, they got another date. It's really bad (N45).

A stay of execution can be granted anytime during the estimated 90 days given before death. Often, the stay is issued the day of execution, putting this population of caretakers through months of grieving, followed by an excruciating final farewell.

**(R4.9) Mental health and emotional support obtained.** Most of the emotional support caretakers receive stems from the offender, family, friends, and God. "I go down there, and I talked to my brother, and he encourages me every time I go down. I go down, to lift him up, and he's lifting me up" (N46). The time spent bonding between supporter and offender is essential to the relationship. "I still treat him as if he were out here. I'll

talk to him about things that are going on. He'll give me lots of advice. So, I get my best friend around" (N47). Other than the quality time spent during visits, emotional support provided by the offender includes handcrafted keepsakes, poetry, letters, and artwork. "I keep paintings and drawings. They make the cards themselves. I keep all the cards and any pictures that they send me" (N48).

More than half of participants gain better mental health through God. Their spiritual connection to God provides strength, encouragement, and motivation to continue caring for their loved ones incarcerated on Texas death row. "That is why God put us here. We firmly believe that. That we were put here together for a reason, and that is to abolish the death penalty" (N49). Another interviewee described how her relationship with God fuels her efforts, which her religious leader validates as righteous. "She (minister) calls me a missionary. That's what she says I am, and she said that she admires me for what I do" (N50).

Faith leaders also contribute emotional support to loved ones of capital offenders by providing reassurance, unconditional love, and compassionate understanding. "Our pastor said, "You guys have deep roots in this land. When the wind blows, you're going to stay strong. You're going to get through this," and that's what we're doing, getting through this" (N51). The use of prayer also provides a release for the suffering this population must endure:

I went into my mom's room, and I just remember seeing my dad's rosary. They were both praying on the bed. So, I went in there, and I joined them. One by one... we all fought all day, and then we prayed for about an hour. Thanking God

for giving him a stay. Praying for strength for us to keep going even if it did happen (N52).

For this participant, the power of God binds and protects their family, offering promise in an impossible situation.

Another critical group for this population's mental health and emotional support is other individuals caring for capital offenders: "I have a lot of people that I've met, like this TDCJ support group on Facebook. I met a lot of those girls in person. I've been friends with them the longest, probably out of everybody" (N53). Families who have been supporting for many years become extremely close as they advocate for one another. One participant explaining how important other supporters and exonerees have been for him, "All the organizations, through the families and the guys themselves... I love everybody" (N54).

Due to the level of activism involved with the role of supporter, members of this community often create their own activist groups. For those who have spent decades navigating the process, their expertise allows for more guidance to new families and friends on Texas death row. Rodrick Reed, brother of Rodney Reed, created the Reed Justice Initiative, which seeks to be "an organization for the death row community." The members of this initiative offer their 23 years of experience as a resource for others new to supporting a loved one on death row. During the Reed Rally for Justice, Rodrick said, "We can kind of guide them along the way just a little bit to help them see their way through darkness, hold your hand up" (N55).

Exonerees hold a special place for many caretakers of capital offenders. The commitment of those who have survived death row offers hope and strength to supporters

currently struggling to save their loved ones. Delia Perez Myers, sister to Louis Perez, during her speech at the Reed Rally for Justice, said the following:

I am most grateful today for the organization called the Witness to Innocence, beloved exonerees who are here, who have stood by our side every step of the way. Attending our marches, our meetings, coming to our families, and sharing their love and their support; being there for us when we needed a shoulder to cry on (N56).

#### **(R2.10) Better Prison Conditions and (R3.10) Related Obstacles**

A critical need to reduce the suffering for caretakers relates to conditions found at the Polunsky Unit. Obstacles to related efforts are the TDCJ, Polunsky Unit, lack of influence, warden, ombudsman, and money. The University of Texas School of Law's Human Rights Clinic report (2017) found that the "Texas capital punishment system stands in violation of basic human rights, as well as a number of international treaties that were voluntarily ratified by the U.S. and which are binding on Texas" (p. 45). The report went on to confirm a "substantial unmet need" for therapy or counseling (p. 42).

These findings are in line with the reports of many participants interviewed for this study who have attempted to secure the necessary mental health services needed. "They don't have counseling in general. They say they do. They don't. And they need to provide that. Everybody has issues there" (N57). One participant stated, "He gets in a mood where he wants to give up, and he just wants them to kill him" (N58). Polunsky's particularly austere conditions exacerbate existing mental health issues, leading to more significant depression, suicidal ideation, and other mental health issues for capital offenders (Johnson, 2016). While there are no mental health services at the Polunsky

Unit, nearby units have mental health professionals on-site. “He’s gone to Jester (separate TDCJ unit) a couple of times, and there are counselors over there, but the counselors aren’t good over there and just provide support for the mentally ill” (N59).

Essentials associated with the well-being of the capital offender are needed across both chronological periods and all three types of care provided: emotional, comfort, and advocacy. Additional obstacles pertain to inadequate physical health care for capital offenders dependent on TDCJ. According to some interviewees, options to supplement hygiene necessities are often out of stock online.

They’ve been without toothbrushes for like three months now at the unit (Polunsky). And there’s not been any on eComm. Their toothbrushes are just little tiny things, and they break. They can’t just buy a toothbrush when they want to, or toothpaste. Sometimes they’re out of toothpaste. So, they don’t take care of their teeth properly, their teeth are getting bad, and they end up with no teeth. Terrible that all their teeth have gotten pulled (N60).

The Polunsky Unit, home to death row in Texas since 1999, is known for its particularly harsh living conditions. Perkinson (2010) states, “Texas’s death row inmates have lived under some of the most restrictive prison conditions anywhere” (p. 65).

Inmates are held in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day in a 6 x 9 ft cell, with a solid steel door preventing most interactions. One participant described a loved one’s descent into madness due to the severe conditions: “He went in fine. He’s losing his mind. He’s pacing up and down. He’s going crazy. And he’s only been on there maybe six, seven years” (N61).



One of the most impactful restrictions at the Polunsky Unit is the exclusion of physical touch. No physical touch is allowed on death row, with visits held behind a thick plane of plexiglass. This restriction impacts not only the capital offenders but their loved ones who are providing care. An interviewee recalls a conversation with her loved one in which he stated, “Just to hold your hand would be amazing.” She remarked, “And you think, for somebody to crave something so simple because they haven’t had human contact for so long. It’s sad” (N62). Another caretaker, commenting through tears, said, “Very cruel. I understand why they wouldn’t let us hug them, you know? We’d never let them go. It’s very hard. Very, very hard” (N63).

**(R4.10) Support obtained in the form of better prison conditions.** Support obtained for better prison conditions includes legislators, academic researchers, media, and activists. In Texas, The University of Texas School of Law’s (2017) revealing research on death row living conditions states, “The current conditions of confinement on Texas death row, including mandatory indefinite isolation, amount to a severe and relentless act of torture which cannot be permitted in the international community” (p. 46). TDCJ declined to work with The University of Texas School of Law clinic during the time of data collection, illuminating the lack of power individuals, organizations, and institutions have outside of the criminal justice system. Key influencers include legal/justice state officials and popular media providers. In one situation, “I reached out to my representative to help him get medical care, and he actually went to the unit itself, saw what was going on, and said that he needed to be treated” (N64).

Other channels for support include programs like the Texas Cure, for which, “all we have to do is send them the name of the inmate . . . what unit they’re at, and they’ll

have a fan delivered to them” (N65). In *Cole v. Collier* (2019), Houston Chronicle journalist Keri Blakinger initiated a legal proceeding to introduce more humane conditions for inmates:

Keri Blakinger was also instrumental in the heat problem. She got some attorneys that agreed to take the TDCJ on about the heat. Now, they haven’t completely got everything settled, but the guys can have two fans instead of one because the fans are not very big (N66).

U.S. District Judge Keith P. Ellison stated in his decision, “Defendants (TDCJ) have shown negligible interest in ascertaining the breadth of the problem, its likely cause, or the necessary remedies,” confirming sentiments of indifference brought forth by participants (*Cole v. Collier*, 2019).

#### **(R2.11) Fair Officials and Processes and (R3.11) Related Obstacles**

Fair officials and processes are an absolute necessity for the population under study. Obstacles to this endeavor are the key actant officials: Texas governor, legislators, and the TDCJ, which includes the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP), warden, and ombudsman. A critical barrier to better prison conditions discovered for members of this community relates to apathetic leaders in charge of managing the sentence of their loved one.

Many interviewed found little relief from officials. “The warden . . . the ombudsman’s office, which they’re supposed to address any issues, but they always come back supporting them themselves because they’re part of the prison” (N67). Another stated, “We need insight. We need somebody else that overlooks the ombudsman. You have an outside person not on the BPP to monitor them because they’re not doing what

they should do” (N68). These engrained processes leave some to ask, “Why do I even bother?” (N69). Certain supporters have found Polunsky unreasonable in terms of removal from a loved one’s visiting list. “They banned me for the keychain from Bath & Body Works. They didn’t question me. They said, ‘Sorry, it’s a security risk. We can’t take that chance. So, you’re banned’” (N70).

Most acts of commutation in Texas are suggested by the BPP and approved by the governor of Texas. The Office of the Governor and the BPP typically work closely on decisions of this matter. The governor may grant clemency as an act of mercy on death row prisoners without the approval of the BPP, yet this has occurred only three times in Texas history (DPIC, 2020). Participants are allowed to present questions and concerns to the BPP once a year (BPP, 2018). Individuals interviewed for this study found significant obstacles when attempting to engage the board. “Trying to address issues for all of us there, we each got less than a minute (each). So, they didn’t hear us. They argued with me” (N71).

#### **(R2.12) Public Education on Capital Punishment and (R3.12) Related Obstacles**

Essential to addressing the stigma suffered by caretakers of capital offenders is greater public awareness regarding the impact of the death penalty through education on (1) Texas capital punishment statutes, (2) injustices found throughout the process, and (3) the impact on family and friends who are victimized by proxy. Leading obstacles include ignorance regarding the Texas death penalty, the media, and the social stigma associated with caring for the capital offender, which includes rejection, harassment, and isolation. One participant described the need for education initiatives because of complacency and general ignorance regarding the statute of capital murder:

I feel like a lot of them (Texans) don't pay attention to the death penalty. Because you'll go to Huntsville, and you'll be like, "I'm here for an execution," and they're like, "They don't do executions here." Or you're in Livingston, "Oh, my husband's on death row." "Death row's not here." "Yes, it is." They don't know about it. I don't know if they don't pay attention or if they just follow Governor Abbott and Governor Perry and all those people that are for the death penalty (N72).

Several caretakers believe that in order to engage the public, a better understanding of the realities related to capital punishment is needed. One interviewee described her process of awareness:

Maybe I would have been anti-death penalty much faster if I had gotten to know that injustice happened more than just in our case. Nothing can possibly go as wrong as this did. But it does. It happens all the time (N73).

Exoneree Anthony Graves described great success reaching individuals during his speaking engagements, sharing the injustices found within the system, opening minds, and transforming bystanders into engaged citizens.

When I tell my story, I hear people come up to me and say, "Listen, I'm a Republican. I believed in the death penalty until I heard your story. I want to know what I can do. What organization can I join to make sure that this doesn't happen again?" (N74).

Another area of focus is death row accommodations. Many caretakers report the public's idea of death row is far from the truth. "They're just like, 'Oh, well, you know, they're in there. They get to do this; they get that . . . No, no, they do not'" (N75). Texas

death row inmates live in some of the harshest conditions in the country (Perkinson 2010, & UT School of Law, 2017). As stated earlier, the cost associated with providing comfort care to capital offenders is a colossal financial burden, often leading only to slight improvements in their condition.

**(R4.12) Support obtained in the form of public education on capital punishment.** All participants interviewed for this study, and many observed, consistently tried to clarify the injustices found throughout the process of capital punishment. Caretakers educate by speaking at rallies, marches, private events, protests, and everyday conversations. Personal stories of those impacted by the death penalty are powerful, honest, and consistent. For this reason, many individuals attempting to educate the public are other supporters of capital offenders. “When you give the state the power to kill with no consequences, you’re doing damage. People just don’t realize that, but I’m trying to reach them. One life at a time, one student at a time” (N76).

The ongoing campaign to spread the truth of impact and injustice found in capital cases bonds this population in solidarity. Other contributors include activists, legal officials, and religious leaders. Nick Been, the nephew of Jeff Wood, spoke as a member of Kids Against the Death Penalty during the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual March to Abolish the Death Penalty:

I’m still a family member of an innocent man on death row. I’ve been speaking about the evils of the death penalty. I have traveled the world and come to find that many people oppose the death penalty in all forms and fashion (N77).

Witness to Innocence member and exoneree Ron Kleine shared his frustration with prosecutorial accountability during the Reed family rally: “Out of hundreds of cases that

I've read about on death row, I've only found six cases where a prosecutor has ever admitted that he did wrong. All the rest of them stand on their roles" (N78). Other supporters spread the word informally, "I talk to friends and family about what I do. I tell my cousins when I'm working at night, making tamales at my third job . . . and they asked a lot of questions" (N79).

### **Summary**

The findings in this study were presented according to the research question they related to, namely the types of care supporters provided those on death row (R1), followed by supporter needs (R2), obstacles related to satisfying such needs (R3), and examples of how they obtained the support they needed (R4). The next section provides further interpretation of these findings, which are discussed in the context of previous research.

## **5. INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS**

### **Summary of the Results**

Research on supporters of capital offenders offers incredible insight into gauging the real community impact of the death penalty. Currently, there is little research on the support provided by this population of caretakers, and the support networks subsequently created. This study aimed to document, organize, and clearly present the experiences of those who support loved ones on Texas death row and the support networks established during the process. The qualitative methods of interviews, focus groups, and participant (field) observations provided rich, descriptive data through transcripts, imagery, and video collected over three months.

Research question one (R1) asked what kind of support those under study were providing. The data revealed three main types of care provided, namely emotional, comfort, and advocacy care. Of the three, emotional and advocacy care are the most critical. The love and attention present in emotional care are imperative to the offender's mental and physical health. Expensive (travel/visits) and stressful, emotional care requires steadfast commitment. These additional barriers make garnering assistance in providing emotional care to loved ones on death row unsurmountable for most. While there is a support network for emotional care, it is often shared by families, friends, and volunteers who are typically supporting their own capital offender.

Comfort care comprises mainly of financial assistance in providing better options for food and necessary hygiene products. While considered "nice to have," comfort care allows supporters to care with clean new shirts, additional soap, toothpaste, soups, snacks, and drinks otherwise not available to the offender.

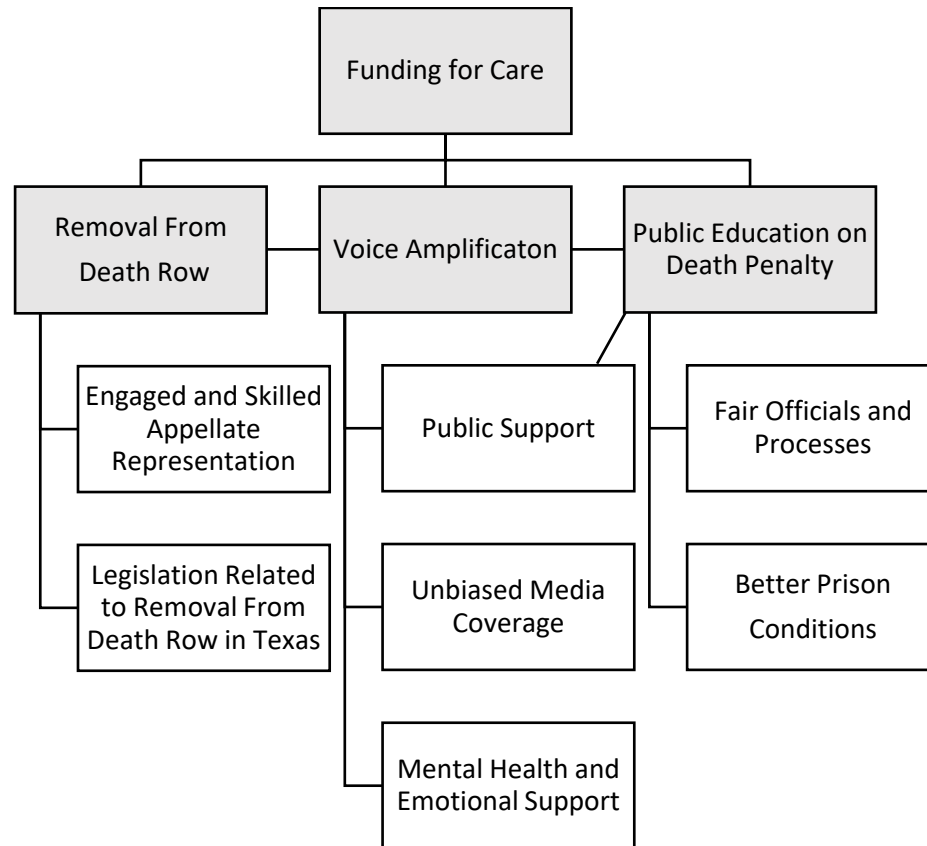
Advocacy care is provided by members of this community to protect the rights of their capital offender. Examples of advocacy care can be split into “inside” and “outside” prison. Inside the prison, supporters advocate for better treatment of their loved ones through calls and meetings with the ombudsman and warden. Outside the prison, advocacy takes the form of activism-based support, which caretakers use to build backing for their plight by holding rallies and marches to garner public attention, writing letters to state officials, and calling or signing petitions to grant clemency or halt a scheduled execution.

Research question two (R2) asked what the needs of this population were. Major themes of supporter needs were (1) the removal of a loved one from death row, (2) skilled appellate representation, (3) legislation related to the removal of a loved one from death row, (4) funding for care, (5) assistance from the offender’s family and friends, (6) voice amplification, (7) unbiased media coverage, (8) public support, (9) mental health and emotional support, (10) better prison conditions, (11) fair legal/justice state officials and processes, and (12) public education on capital punishment (see Figure 3).

From the list above, four overarching, or parent, needs help simplify the requirements of the population under study: (1) removal of the loved one from death row, (2) funding, (3) voice amplification, and (4) public education on capital punishment. For example, the need for funding overlaps significantly with the need to remove the loved one from death row, skilled appellate representation, voice amplification, and public education on capital punishment. Similarly, the need for public education on capital punishment intersects with numerous other needs including legislation related to the



removal of death row, mental health and emotional support, and fair legal/justice state officials and processes (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3. Overarching Themes Related to Needs.*

Research question three (R3) examined existing obstacles to providing support. Popular obstacles include money, appellate counsel, Texas capital punishment statutes, travel, lack of influence, society/larger community, lack of supporters, stigma related to death row, trauma, stress, emotional suffering, TDCJ, warden, ombudsman, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, Texas governor, and legislators. Research question four (R4) explored the support obtained by the caretakers under study. The top actants for support

obtained are activist organizations, religious organizations, family and friends, academia, journalists, individual activists, other supporters of capital offenders, self, and the capital offender. Narrative discourse analysis revealed significant overlap between actants and between plot descriptors connected to the needs, obstacles, and support obtained (see Figures 4 and 5).

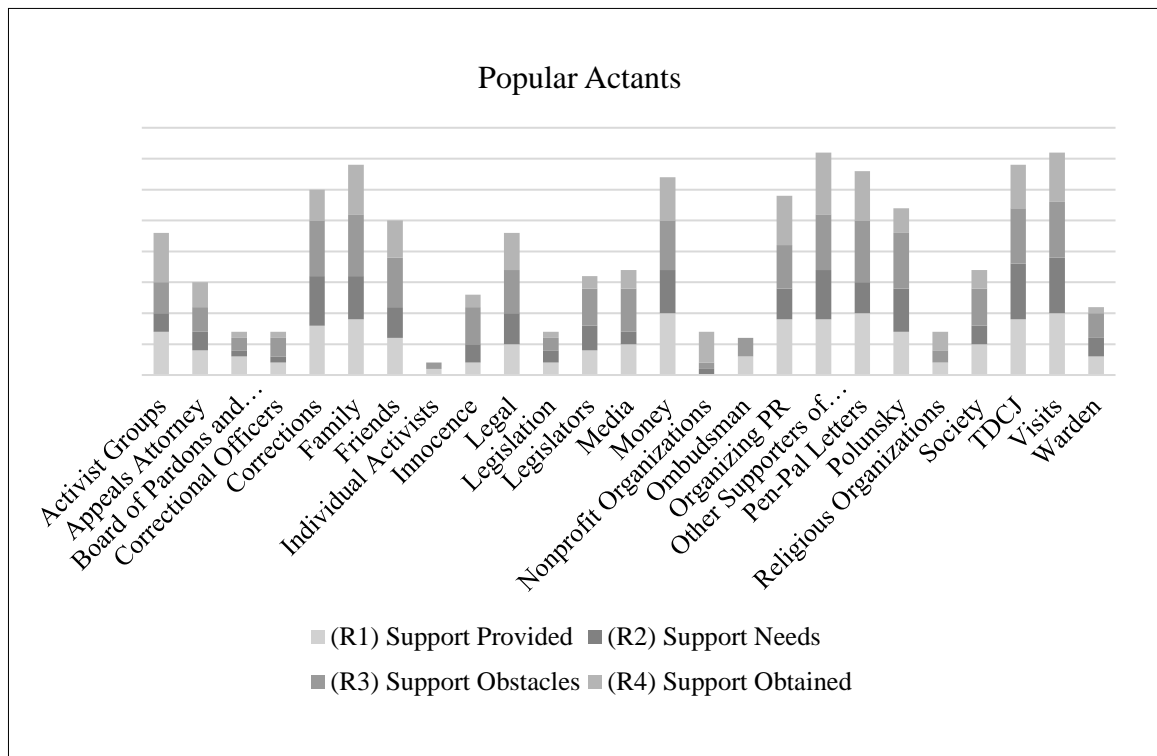


Figure 4. Overlap of Popular Actants Discovered.

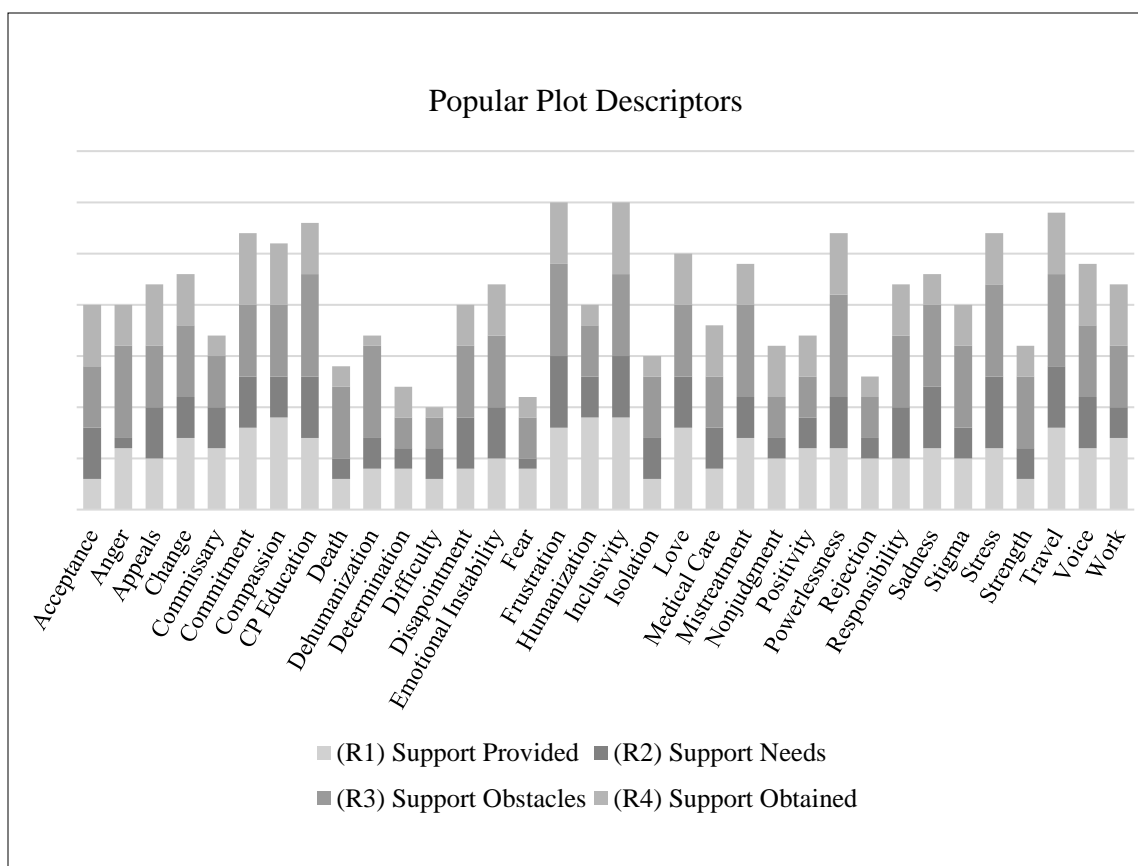


Figure 5. Overlap of Popular Plot Descriptions Discovered.

### Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study are helpful in better understanding the impact the death penalty has on those who love and care for capital offenders on Texas death row. The support provided varied among supporters from nothing to the utmost possible.

Emotional care is a basic necessity required for the survival of loved ones while in solitary confinement for the majority of their time, with no television, touching, or interactions allowed. Comfort care is a luxury that supporters use to help ease the discomfort of death row while gaining some control, albeit small, over the harsh conditions of Texas death row in the Polunsky Unit. Emotional care and comfort care are typically insular. Supporters tend to provide the money necessary for comfort care. When

support is obtained for emotional care (visits/letters), it usually is provided by other family and friends of the capital offenders or other supporters who bond during visits and assist one another in offering validation and compassion to each other's capital offender.

Advocacy care inside the prison is solely the responsibility of the supporter. Participants range in the level of advocating they offer. For those who do reach out to TDCJ, the warden, or ombudsman, the results are minimal at best. Some offenders fear retaliation by prison staff if supporters advocate on behalf of their incarcerated loved ones. Retaliation includes missed meals, mistreatment by correctional officers, and delays in the mail.

Advocacy care outside prison, however, offers the largest support network. The potential for others to advocate for the supporter's cause appears limitless. Activist support varies among supporters. Most supporters appear to engage in activist events if not for their own cause but to support the cause of another family supporting a loved one through the death penalty. The most crucial factor in advocacy care is voice amplification. During the Reed family rally to FreeRodneyReed, an important strategy for gaining support was amplifying the voices of the Reed family. Rodrick stated the following:

But we have a voice today. We don't have to sit back. We've been set free to be able to let our voices be heard. And if we come together as a people to let our voices be heard, we will make a change. We can do something great in this community (A11).

The Reed family campaign FreeRodneyReed produced millions of supporters worldwide with voice amplifiers like appellate attorneys, legal/justice state officials, celebrity

activists, and prominent media coverage. The Reeds' success appears to have benefited from the strategy of amplifying the voices of the Reed family along with tireless activism by family and friends.

Narrative discourse analysis themes regarding power dynamics critical to narrative criminology reveal supporters of capital offenders struggle to have their voices heard by TDCJ, state and federal authorities and wider communities, and other entities over the period of time their loved ones spend on Texas death row. Supporters frequently speak about their voices as members of the community and how best to amplify their voices. The overarching theme of voice amplification is closely linked to the needs of public support and public education on capital punishment, which are essential to minimizing the stigma present for this population of caretakers.

Change is another important finding related to stigma and capital punishment. While speaking during the Reed family rally, Rodrick Reed stated the following:

I'm here to tell you that we have people stepping up. You people, other people in this community are stepping up. And slowly, they are easing that knife (symbolic for brother's death sentence) out of my family so we can be whole again (A12).

Many participants also spoke of a slow public shift away from demonstrable stigma toward more compassion and greater understanding. The Rodney Reed case demonstrates the power of voice amplification and the shift in public attitudes toward capital punishment. Millions of citizens across the country advocated on behalf of the Reeds because they heard their voice, "Rodney is innocent; test the DNA," and the public agreed.

## **Comparisons With Previous Findings**

Data findings show consistency with previous literature on the topic. Caretakers experience unbelievable suffering caused by their loved one's death sentence. Supporters must navigate a profound public stigma, and, while desperate for assistance, most struggle to find the support they need. That being said, a vast, organic support network exists to those able to access it, revealing a support network that fluctuates greatly depending on supporter advocacy efforts and the mitigating circumstances of the capital offender's case.

The present findings are consistent with previous literature on the suffering caused by the impact of capital punishment on family and friends (Beck et al., 2007; Beck & Britto, 2006; Bessler, 2019; Jones & Beck, 2007; Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Sharp, 2005; Smykla, 1987). Supporters suffer from trauma related to a lengthy, decade-plus process of the impending death of their loved one; cultural stigma that permeates many aspects of their lives; and the constant desperation that comes from having little influence over the many processes and little means to save a loved one's life.

Data from this study also reveals a major disparity between the support available and the support needed by this population of caretakers, consistent with existing literature (Beck, Britto, & Andrews, 2009; Jones & Beck, 2007; Joy, 2013; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Smykla, 1987). However, while assistance is hard to come by, this study exposes a considerable support network of key influencers in all important sectors related to capital punishment: legal, judicial, legislative, TDCJ, media, and the public. Additional support is found within the close network of friends and associates of the supporter, religious organizations, other supporters of capital offenders, and group activists.

## **Limitations**

Limitations for the study included a small sample size, overrepresentation of advocacy care data collected, and convenience sampling, which created similarities between many of the participants. The ideal sample size for this study is driven by theoretical saturation. Difficulties in recruitment limited the diversity of participants because many participants were recruited from activist events. Notably absent from the participants were parents of capital offenders. The elder supporters of this community are insulated by their children and their spouses to protect their mental and physical health. While I was able to secure contact information for two mothers, before interviews could be established, conversations with close relatives suggested the parents of capital offenders are often too delicate to take on the additional stress of an interview.

Issues in the design can be accounted for by (1) insufficient time allotted, (2) unpredictable situations, and (3) geographic distance. The time allotted for data collection was insufficient. Supporters have particularly hectic lives as they balance both regular and death row caretaker lives. Weekends often involve several obligations, including visits to the Polunsky Unit in Livingston, Texas, and death penalty-related activist events. Meeting in person was not possible for many. The telephone interviews were very productive and insightful but paled in comparison to in-person interviews during which I can observe mannerisms while connecting on a more intimate level.

The instability of the lives of those under study also proved a difficult challenge to overcome. For example, observations of the Reed family events happened organically throughout the time of data collection. Individuals who initially believed they had time for an interview were suddenly doing the urgent work of securing a stay for a leading

family in the community. The weekends of many were booked with activist events, prison visits, and family time, highlighting the small time frame given for the size of the study. Lastly, the size of Texas and the geographic distance between supporters proved unsurmountable when attempting to organize focus groups.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Future research would benefit from securing access to capital offenders' mothers and fathers to better understand the full impact of capital punishment on communities. Supportive parents contribute greatly to the emotional care of capital offenders. Parents of capital offenders are particularly guarded by their adult children who attempt to minimize the suffering as much as possible. With sufficient time, the trust and flexibility necessary for accessing the most vulnerable of supporters can be established.

Another possible area of inquiry is the need for education on capital punishment (R2.12). What does the public know about the death penalty in Texas? What would a campaign to educate the public on the facts related to capital punishment look like? What resources are needed to effectively engage with the public? What methods work best to reach both fence sitters and ardent supporters of the death penalty? Finally, a deductive approach testing the results of this study would provide vital information regarding the validity of my findings.

### **Implications of the Study**

Qualitative impact research in the criminal justice field is necessary to closely examine the lived experience of those innocent citizens devastated by the death penalty. Understanding the damage caused by a death sentence would allow key officials to make well-informed decisions regarding the personal and community consequences of capital



punishment (Bessler, 2019; King, 2005; King & Norgard, 1999; Smykla, 1987). Smykla (1987) states the following:

If social justice is ever to be achieved, it will be necessary to expand our views about good and evil and to include many more individuals in examinations of victimization. It is highly probable that a new and broader paradigm will be developed (p. 332).

Research on the families and friends of capital offenders is needed for restorative justice initiatives to include all those devastated by the execution of a human being. Without a real understanding of supporters' victimization, they remain invisible to the justice and legal systems.

The second practical implication for this study is the historical documentation of a shrinking populace facing extraordinary circumstances that will slowly dissolve with the cultural evolution of humankind. As standards of decency increase across the U.S., support for the death penalty are decreasing, with states abolishing the penalty annually (DPIC 2019). Texas is by far the most aggressive state issuing and enacting death warrants of those sentenced to die. Documenting Texans who are experiencing the death penalty as innocent bystanders provides additional context on capital punishment in Texas and the community within.

Finally, the presentation of the data offers clear needs for the population under study. There is little support for caretakers new to the process of caring for a loved one on Texas death row. This study attempts to demystify the experience by sharing collective stories to offer a glimpse of the support available to individuals in their situation. The micronarrative tries to launch a shared voice for supporters of capital offenders. The

study centers on the unique needs discovered in order to distill the numerous activities, obstacles, and support networks of those under observation into clear objectives that could aid caretakers' dire situations.

## **Conclusions**

This thesis study set out to understand better the families and friends of capital offenders in regard to the support they provide, their unique needs, the obstacles present and the support available. The research questions uncovered a wealth of data on the support provided by capital offender caretakers including emotional, comfort, and advocacy care. The study also discovered a strong subculture of supporters who survive incredible circumstances with sheer determination and love for the capital offender who waits to be executed. The desperate nature of their predicament often involves tremendous activism, which organically builds a support network of key state officials, nonprofit and religious organizations, and public support, depending on the mitigating circumstances of their loved one's case: for example, a legitimate claim to innocence, mental disability, or criminal justice misconduct.

Once offenders are sentenced to death and sent to death row, they largely disappear from the social milieu and, for most, are forgotten. The support provided by this population fills significant gaps in care for loved ones experiencing some of the harshest prison conditions in the U.S. (Perkinson 2010, & UT School of Law, 2017.) Many times, supporters are on their own, either taking the brunt of the work for the extended family or because they are the only ones providing support to the capital offender. Despite the trauma, stress, depression, exhaustion, financial distress, distance, and lack of support, many providers commit their lives to keeping their loved one alive.

This focus on the survival of their husband, son, brother, or uncle is not one that can be off-loaded because often the supporter is the capital offender's only hope.

In conclusion, research on the impact of capital punishment requires a close examination of the consequences the death penalty creates. Supporters of capital offenders are devastated by the death sentence imposed on their loved ones. While they are not victims of the crime, their experience presents clear suffering and trauma caused by the criminal justice system. In order to properly evaluate the death penalty, the voices of those who love capital offenders need to be heard. Research documenting this population of caretakers adds to the current literature on the community impact of capital punishment, and simultaneously amplifies the supporters' voice. Texas supporters of capital offenders are hopeful that, by sharing their experiences with the death penalty, public and state officials will move Texas forward toward more humane restorative methods and away from the violent destruction caused by the death sentence.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### Appendix A - Interview Protocol

Let's get some background information on you.

- Work? Religious? Married? Children?
- Any major life-defining events in your life separate from this experience?
- Who do you support at Polunsky?
- How many?
- For how long?
- How has this changed your life?
- What has been the biggest change?

How would you describe your relationship(s) with the individual(s) at the Polunsky unit?

- Brother? Husband? Boyfriends? Son?
- When they were arrested, how did you handle that situation?
- How did it make you feel?

How would you describe their criminal case?

- What are your thoughts about their crime?
- How does that affect you?
- How did it affect the relationship?
- Does it impact the level of support you provide?
- Does it impact the level of support you receive?

Why do you choose to support?

- How did this role develop?
- How would you describe your role? Supporter? Caretaker? Care provider?

What support or help are you providing?

- Help me work on a list so we can talk about them one at a time.

Are there any obstacles you run into when trying to provide that support?

- If yes, what are they?
- What is the effect?
- How does that make you feel?

Are you the only one who is providing support/care?

- If yes, why?
- And how does that make you feel?
- If no, who is helping?

Why do you think they are providing support?

- Are they helpful?
- How does that make you feel?

What needs do you have?

- Do you have the support you need?
- If no, what do you need?
- Why do you think you are not getting this support?
- If yes, what help are you getting?
- Is the help useful?
- Why? Why not?
- How does that make you feel?
- Follow up questions if related to imprisonment?
- Describe to me what it's like to visit someone at Polunsky?
- What has been hardest for them at Polunsky?

- What's been hardest for you?
- Follow up questions if related to appeals?
- How's the appeals process been for you?
- Length of process?
- What is your involvement?
- What challenges does this process create?
- Follow up questions if related to execution?
- Help me understand what it's like for you to be in this situation.
- How has it affected you?
- Emotionally? Socially?

How do you go about finding the help or support you need?

- Walk me through that. Do you ask for help?
- If yes, give an example.
- If no, why is that?

What obstacles do you face when trying to find the support you need?

- Why do you think they are there?
- How does that make you feel?

How do you keep going? What do you rely on to keep motivated?

- What are the things you struggle with the most?
- How do you handle that?
- Do loved ones around you know this?
- If yes, how do they react or show support?
- If no, why is that?

Do you feel supported by your community (friends/family)?

- Do you feel like you can talk to anyone about this?
- If yes, to whom and does it help?
- If no, how does that affect you?
- How are you supported?
- By whom?
- For how long?

Do you feel understood by your wider community?

- Do you feel like you are different from others supporting loved ones in prison?
- If yes, how so? Examples?
- If no, how so? Examples?

What has been most rewarding about supporting your loved one at Polunsky?

What would you tell someone just starting this journey?

The majority of Americans are not personally affected by capital punishment. If you could describe this experience to those looking in from the outside, what would you say?

Is there anything you would like to add?

## **Appendix B - Focus Group Protocol**

### **Introductions**

- Name?
- Loved one at Polunsky?
- Nature of relationship?
- Any relationships between one another?
- If yes, tell me more about that.

### **What SUPPORT are you providing?**

- Please write anything you do to support your loved one(s) on your sticky notes. One to a sticky note. When you are done, place the sticky notes under the section titled SUPPORT on the whiteboard.
- Let's discuss the support provided listed on the board. As we discuss each sticky note, similar

### **What do you NEED help with?**

- Please write down all your needs associated with providing support. One to a sticky note. When you're done, please place the sticky notes under the column titled NEEDS on the whiteboard in the row it pertains to.
- Let's discuss the updated whiteboard. As previously done, similar thoughts or ideas will be placed next to one another on the whiteboard. Anything missing?
- Let's discuss why you need help for each need

### **WHY do you need help with these needs?**

- Please write down why you need help or support for each "need". One to a sticky note. When you're done, please place the sticky notes under the column titled WHY in the row it pertains to.
- Let's discuss the updated whiteboard. As previously done, similar thoughts or ideas will be placed next to one another on the whiteboard. Anything missing?

### **WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT do you see being most useful?**

- Please write down what kind of help or support would be most useful. One to a sticky note. When you're done, please place the sticky notes under the column titled WHAT CAN HELP in the row it pertains to.
- Let's discuss the updated whiteboard. As previously done, similar thoughts or ideas will be placed next to one another on the whiteboard.

### **What BARRIERS could prevent you from getting this need met?**

- Please write down any barriers to getting the help you need. One to a sticky note.
- When you're done, please place the sticky notes under the column title BARRIERS in the row it pertains to.
- Let's discuss the updated whiteboard. As previously done, similar thoughts or ideas will be placed next to one another on the whiteboard. Anything missing?
- Now that our board is laid out with all the information you guys provided.

### **Overall thoughts about the board?**

- What do you think?
- What sticks out to you?

- Anything surprising?
- How does the board make you feel?
- Anything upset you more than others?
- Is there anything that makes you feel more hopeful than the others?
- Anything missing?

**Final thoughts before we call it a wrap?**

SUPPORT	NEEDS	WHY	WHAT CAN HELP	HOW TO GET IT	BARRIERS

ex. of whiteboard layout

## Appendix C - Informed Consent



Study Title: A Qualitative Study of the Support Network of Those Supporting  
Loved Ones on Texas Death Row

<b>Principal Investigator:</b> Nicole Kinbarovsky	<b>Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:</b> Dr. Lucia Summers
Email: NHK5@txstate.edu Phone: (512) 914-3832	Email: lsummers@txstate.edu Phone: (512) 245-2389

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to formally state your willingness to take part on tape and this will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about how those caring for loved ones on Texas death row find the necessary support leading up to, during, and after the process of execution. The information gathered will be used for my research thesis. You are being asked to participate because you have experienced providing care for a loved one on Texas death row.

### PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will take part in a one-to-one interview lasting approximately one and a half hours. There is also a possibility of being selected to take part in a 2 hr focus group of 3 to 4 people. A suitable time will be set for you and myself (Nicole) to meet in or nearby Livingston, TEXAS. During the interview and focus group if selected, I will ask you about your experiences regarding someone you care about in death row, with an emphasis on the impact this has had on you and the support network you have. The interviews will be audio recorded (and later transcribed), to ensure I have an accurate record of what is discussed. However, to protect your confidentiality, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and recordings will be securely kept. Please be aware if selected for focus groups you will be video and audio recorded to accurately record what was discussed for transcribing.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep any information related to you private and confidential. This information will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Only the members of the research team (Nicole and Lucia) and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.



## **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

## **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

If any of the interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer that particular question, or to stop your participation altogether, at any time and without having to give a reason for this. If you become distressed during the interview, I will stop the interview for a water and rest break. A quiet space has been secured, if needed. If after 5-10 minutes you are still very upset, or I have become worried for your safety, I will call Burke Mental Health Services (located in Livingston, Texas) 24-hour crisis hotline at 1-800-392-8343 to request advice/assistance or even 911, if necessary.

If you feel discomfort after participating, you should let me know so I can make sure you are appropriately supported at that time.

## **BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide will help fill significant gaps in scientific knowledge about how those supporting loved ones on Texas death row find support. As little is known about this group, any data we collect will be a useful addition to what we know about this topic and hopefully be used to improve resource/support access for individuals such as yourself.

## **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

## **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Nicole Kinbarovsky, by email (nhk5@txstate.edu) or by phone (512-914-3832). This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on July 2, 2019. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert (512-716-2652, dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager (512-245-2334, meg201@txstate.edu).

## **DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT**

If, after reading this form, you decide that you want to participate in the project described above, you will be asked to formally state you're willing to take part on tape. You should only do this if the general purpose of the research, what you'll have to do if you take part, and the possible risks have been explained to your satisfaction. You should also understand you can withdraw at any time.

Verbal consent is used in lieu of a signed consent, so we don't have to have your name and signature on record. This will help us keep your identity confidential.

**By agreeing to take part in the interview, you also consent to being audio -recorded.**



## Appendix D - Informed Consent - Focus Groups



Study Title: A Qualitative Study of the Support Network of Those Supporting  
Loved Ones on Texas Death Row

<b>Principal Investigator:</b> Nicole Kinbarovsky	<b>Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor:</b> Dr. Lucia Summers
Email: NHK5@txstate.edu Phone: (512) 914-3832	Email: lsummers@txstate.edu Phone: (512) 245-2389

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to formally state your willingness to take part on tape and this will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

### PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about how those caring for loved ones on Texas death row find the necessary support leading up to, during, and after the process of execution. The information gathered will be used for my research thesis. You are being asked to participate because you have experienced providing care for a loved one on Texas death row.

### PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will take part in a focus group lasting approximately two hours, where you will participate in a discussion with others in a similar position to yours. A suitable time will be set for you, myself (Nicole), and about 4-6 other participants to meet in or nearby Livingston, Texas. Participants will gather and discuss their experiences regarding someone they care about in death row, with an emphasis on the impact this has had on them, what their needs are, and how they access the support they need. I will lead and facilitate this discussion. The focus groups will be audio- and video-recorded (and later transcribed), to ensure I have an accurate record of what is discussed. To protect the confidentiality of participants, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and faces will be blurred on the videos; recordings will be securely kept. I take your privacy seriously and will do everything I can to keep it private and confidential. While I ask the same from everyone participating in the focus group, there is no way I can guarantee your privacy. It's important you know this before you decide to share with the group.

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep any digital information related to you private and confidential. This information will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Only the members of the research team (Nicole and Lucia) and the Texas State University Office of Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

## **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

## **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

If any of the focus group questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer that particular question, or to stop your participation altogether, at any time and without having to give a reason for this. If anyone becomes distressed during the focus group, I will stop the focus group for a water and rest break. A quiet space has been secured, if needed, and is available throughout the focus group if anyone needs some privacy. If after 5-10 minutes someone is still very upset, or I have become worried for their safety, I will call Burke Mental Health Services (located in Livingston, Texas) 24-hour crisis hotline at 1-800-392-8343 to request advice/assistance or even 911, if necessary. If you feel discomfort after participating, you should let me know so I can make sure you are appropriately supported at that time.

## **BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide will help fill significant gaps in scientific knowledge about how those supporting loved ones on Texas death row find support. As little is known about this group, any data we collect will be a useful addition to what we know about this topic and hopefully be used to improve resource/support access for individuals such as yourself.

## **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. As the group leader, I will work to keep your information private and confidential, and I would ask that everyone agree to do the same; however, even if everyone agrees to confidentiality, I cannot guarantee this for other group members. I just want you to know that before we begin so you can fully decide what you want to share.

## **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Nicole Kinbarovsky, by email (nhk5@txstate.edu) or by phone (512-914-3832).

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on July 2, 2019. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert (512-716-2652, dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager (512-245-2334, meg201@txstate.edu).

## DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

If, after reading this form, you decide that you want to participate in the project described above, you will be asked to formally state you're willing to take part on tape. You should only do this if the general purpose of the research, what you'll have to do if you take part, and the possible risks have been explained to your satisfaction. You should also understand you can withdraw at any time. Verbal consent is used in lieu of a signed consent, so we don't have to have your name and signature on record. This will help us keep your identity confidential.

By agreeing to take part in the focus group, you also consent to being audio- and video-recorded. Please let me know if you'd like to be positioned so your face is not visible (e.g., having your back to the camera). If your face appears on the video, this will be blurred to protect your identity.



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## Appendix E - Crisis Support Resource List

### **Air Force Village Hospice**

Chaplain Dr. Luis Carlos Sanchez  
(210) 838-6340  
Twelve-week grief recovery program  
for any type of loss.  
12455 Freedom Way  
San Antonio, TX 78238

### **A-Med Community Hospice and Home Health**

Chaplain Charles Murray  
(210) 734-6300  
Ongoing bereavement support  
4903 Golden Quail, Ste. 110  
San Antonio, TX 78240

### **BURKE**

[www.myburke.org](http://www.myburke.org)  
(936) 634-5010 or (866) 242-4556  
Burke provides complete mental health services to adults and children in East Texas. From our 24-Hour Crisis Line and innovative counseling and treatment interventions to our state-of-the-art mental health emergency center in Lufkin, we have the facilities, resources, and staff to help East Texans in need.

### **Harbour Hospice Bereavement Support**

Chaplain Cleo Kukeya  
(210) 403-9911  
Life After Loss classes twice a year  
(spring and fall)  
12915 Jones Maltsberger, Ste. 501  
San Antonio, TX 78247

### **Grief Recovery Helpline**

(800) 445-4808  
Offers counseling, referrals, support, and publications.

### **IMALIVE**

[www.imalive.org](http://www.imalive.org)  
IMAlive is a live online network that uses instant messaging to respond to people in crisis. Serves anyone, in any type of crisis, providing access to free, 24/7 support.

### **Lifeline Crisis Chat**

[www.contact-usa.org/chat.html](http://www.contact-usa.org/chat.html)  
Text HOME to 741741 Crisis Text Line  
Any type of crisis,  
providing access to free, 24/7 support.

### **My Grief Angels (MGA)**

[www.mygriefangels.org](http://www.mygriefangels.org)  
Our mission is to help each of us grieving to help ourselves by leveraging the power of technology to access the latest grief research, education, resources and community-building tools.

### **SAMHSA's National Helpline**

(800) 662-HELP (4357)  
Confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

### **Samaritans Hotline**

[www.samaritansnyc.org/calling-the-hotline/](http://www.samaritansnyc.org/calling-the-hotline/)  
When You Need Someone to Talk to 24/7  
(212) 673-3000  
Samaritans free, non-religious 24-hour emotional support and crisis response hotline is available on an immediate and ongoing basis for people who are dealing with every kind of problem, situation, illness, trauma or loss and need someone to talk to.

**The Ecumenical Center**

[www.echrh.org](http://www.echrh.org)

(210) 616-0885, ext. 214

Services include support groups, counseling and education for children, families and individuals of all ages. Also offering the Life After Loss bereavement support group program.

**UTHSC Allograft Resources**

[www.change100lives.com](http://www.change100lives.com)

(210) 567-0528

Grief support on various topics.

Westage Medical Building

5282 Medical Drive, Ste. 605

San Antonio, TX 78229

Monthly grief support workshops on 2nd  
Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.

## Appendix F - Characteristics of Supporter Quotes

Characteristics of Supporter Quotes	
Popular Codes: Offender Family, Missionary, Inclusivity, Advocate/Educate, Vote, Voice/ Lack of Influence, Humanize, Emotional Suffering, Misunderstood, Sacrifice, Compassion, Visits, Offender, Validation	
CH1	It's just one of those things, maybe one of the psychological things, or one of the mental things, in my heart, this is my child, and I'm going to do the best that we can to take care of him.
CH2	I was writing him, and I would tell him about my family. He said, "If you would have been my mom, I would not be here," and he asked me if I would be his mom. He has a mother. But she's non-existent. When he asked me to be his mom, once I accepted being his mom, I truly consider him my blood. I love him as much as I love my children.
CH3	I got very involved with and, you know, I personally mortgaged my house or got a got a home equity loan to try to, you know, do some do some defense for him, you know, hire an investigator and another one is, I guess, hiring an investigator two different times through the lawyer. And then he was executed and that just wiped me out. One of the worst days of my life.
CH4	I try to be as positive and upbeat towards him just so he can have a positive outlook on things, too. But I do have my moments where it's like, I'll just cry. I don't know where I'm just like, it's hard. I mean, it doesn't really get easier.
CH5	I have my days where it's like, is this really my life, but I don't let it bring me down enough where I'm just like, I cannot go on.

## Appendix G - Emotional Care Quotes

Chronological Period 1 - Before an Execution Date is Scheduled	
Popular Codes: Love, Attention, Acceptance, Guidance	
E1	I look at him as human beings, I look at them as friends. I don't think about what they did in the past because people do change. People do things that are they never would do if they weren't drinking or weren't on drugs... and they have time they go to prison, they have time, plenty of time to think about what they did.
E2	My main purpose of supporting them is giving them the things that they need to be able to live out what they're living, and then should they come to the end to execution that they know where they're going.
E3	We do have a communion. We'll do bread, a cracker and we'll drink grape juice, would you holy communion and we'll say a prayer and we'll, we'll we'll do the holy communion together.
E4	In one of the letters, he said, "When I wake up every morning now, I just feel better because I know that you're closer." So, I think just knowing that I'm here and knowing that I'm with him. That's his kind of happy time, I suppose. He loves getting mail. So, I have to send him loads of mail.
E5	I've had a pretty good job most of my life, that I could support him. Now I'm retired, so I have time to go each week. You know, my parents are elderly, and they can't make the trip. And I know that. We have to do it; we have to do it.
E6	And once they say that they don't have any visits, and they're not asking for things, they're not asking for money, they just would like to have somebody visit them every now and then. Then I'll ask them if he will put my husband and I both on your list. And we'll come see. And normally they put both of us on, and then we go visit them as a couple
E7	They enjoy my visits; they enjoy what I feed them. He makes a little piece of paper and cuts it out. And he puts "I want a salad," or "I want sausage and cheese." He wants whatever's on that list. And when I get there, he'll stick it in the window (smiling) and I tell him, "If I can read it. I can get it for you." I can go over there and buy 'em... Get them going.
E8	I get a lot of letters. I also send a lot to him. He's pretty good. This week already. I've had six. So, probably I'll get maybe nine or 10 a week. Sometimes I write three a day. I mean, they're not long, long essay letters, but he likes to say he's spoiled. He loves his mail. So, I just write, "I love you, miss you." Just tell him what I've done and things like that.
E9	I send them a lot of pictures. My friends, my world... They want to use my eyes so they can see what they're
Chronological Period 2 – After an execution is scheduled through final wishes.	
Popular Codes: Love, Compassion, Duty, Pain, Sadness	



- E10 Whenever it gets about a month away from the execution date, if they haven't said anything about wanting us to be with him when they die, I approach him, and I tell him, "I want you to know my feelings about you dying alone. I don't like it. I would like to be there with you so that you can see me. I think it would bring comfort to you to see me." Sometimes they'll say, "Oh, but I didn't want to put you through that. I wanted to ask you, but I just didn't because I didn't want to put you through it." And I said, "I'm okay. I'm not okay with what they're doing to you, but I'm okay being there. And I want you to be able to see me tell you I love you before you go out of this world."
- E11 I'm a pretty tough mother. I do not let them say no. And I'm so, so happy that I was there. It was very hard. I thought that the inmates being executed could not see the people in the room. They cannot see the victim side. But they can see us because when I got into that room, the officer said, "Get close to the window so he can see you." I was shocked. I am so glad that I came for him, so he wasn't alone.
- E12 He was paralyzed from talking. But he could still feel the burn, and his eyes were looking at us like "help me." You want to just break through that glass and go in there and jerk those things out of his arm. That's what you feel. But, I didn't of course, tears were streaming down my face. And I said "I love you. We all love you." And he just looked at me with his eyes like, "I love you, too." but he couldn't say anything and then he died. So, it was a hard. He died very rough, but he wanted us there. And we were there. And that was his refuge, that we were there.
-

## Appendix H - Comfort Care Quotes

Chronological Period 1 and 2 - Before an execution date is scheduled through final wishes.	
Popular Codes: Money, Necessary, Compassion, Burden	
C1	If we don't send money to him, people literally have nothing. He has to pay for his own soap, you've got to pay for extra food, he's got to pay for paper. He has to pay for a pencil, you've got to pay for everything. And that burden really is passed on to the family if they have family that's supporting them.
C2	It's about one thousand dollars per month that includes visits, food, books or magazines, or sending him commissary, money on his books, going to visit buying the lunch meals, and then gas. For my brother, I want him to live his life, just as if he were out here. To be comfortable, to be able to eat well, and sleep well. It's just one of those things, maybe one of the psychological things, or one of the mental things, in my heart, this is my child, and I'm going to do the best that we can to take care of him.
C3	Generally, I give him \$200 a month, so he can go to store twice a month. Prison food is disgusting. I want to make sure he eats. And then his mom helps out a lot too. So sometimes I'll do hundred, and she'll do \$100. And then they have this website called ecom and I can go on there and pick out some food for him on there. You have \$60 every three months to spend. So, I can go out there and pick out drinks and food. He needs writing paper and pens and stuff, I can send that to him, too.
C4	They had they feed him stuff that let me tell you what happened this week. They had maggots the food, so the guys didn't eat lunch at two three o'clock. [name removed] told me there was maggots in the food and the chicken. So, they didn't get their dinner to after eight o'clock.
C5	I just do it off my own back, because I want to make sure that he's got what he needs. His dad sends money. Not much, but you know, it all helps. But now I think it's more kind of my pride as his wife, wanting to make sure that he's looked after... So, it's all good (no complaining tone) I kind of enjoy doing it in a way.

## Appendix I - Advocacy Care Quotes

Chronological Period 1 – Before an Execution Date is Scheduled	
Popular Codes: Love, Attention, Acceptance, Guidance	
A1	State of Texas had this rule: inmate is supposed to have a cup of ice with water twice a day. Some days they get cold water at least once that day. Sundays, they don't get nothing. Now, who do I argue with now? (cynically) Right. And that's without AC too. So, they really are. I mean, the process.....is failing. Yeah, he's not getting the cold water. And I want to think if you don't have enough people then get the goddamn people out here and get them get them the water. I don't understand.
A2	Well, his health Yeah, the health department for the whole thing sucks. So, he was bleeding out his backside, to be quite politically correct, for almost two years. And they didn't do anything but give him freaking saltwater to gargle. What does that have to do with bleeding out of your anus? I just don't i don't understand it.
A3	What can I do? I called the Ombudsman. I said, "Look, they've (correctional officer) broken it (typewriter), they've admitted that broken it. They're now trying to backtrack because otherwise the money would come out of this C.O.'s (correction officer) paycheck. They don't want that to happen. And so, on his grievance, they're saying, "Well, actually, she didn't break it." Because I called them, he got called into the captain's office about a week later. And the captain said, "Boy, your wife's been in contact with somebody in Huntsville about your typewriter. Now, I've spoken to the C.O. She's admitted she's broken it. Give me a week and we'll replace it." They're supposed to take about a month, six weeks maximum to sort agreements, and this went on for nearly three months.
A4	I actually became board members of several of the anti death penalty organizations that were there at the march. It's just media campaign, going to the Texas representatives because even though they're not there, I drive to places that I know to go and speak with them at their offices, saying, "Look, this is crunch time. I really need your support on that."
A5	They just didn't go. So, my husband and I decided to go meet his family. I started talking about the situation that my son was living on death row, and I could just see their eyes kind of get watery, but I was doing it on purpose. I said, "Y'all need to think about your brother and what he's going through. Y'all, we have our lives and we did not put him on death row. Their mistakes put them on death row, but you need to be behind your family." So that's the kind of stuff that I do as a mother. I don't just promise things and not carry them out. I do them.
Chronological Period 2 - After an execution is scheduled through final wishes.	
Popular Codes: Love, compassion, duty, pain, and sadness.	
A6	When they get their dates, I said, "Well, now we need to need to talk about what do you want to do with your remains. Do you want them cremated? Because we

have a cremation fund also that we have set up that I put \$100 a month into the creation fund. That's if someone wants to be cremated, we pay for their cremation. We can't pay for burials, because that's too expensive. you're looking at like \$8,000. And so, we just pay for cremations because that's only about \$950 to have him cremated.

A7 It's major go time for three months up to that. I mean, I can't even tell you what kind of crazy I was. Literally, I was on the computer over 20 hours a day, writing anybody and everybody that I could get ahold of. Just trying to get somebody, anybody, to listen, anybody with any kind of influence whatsoever, you know? Hey, please write these people!

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Reed Family "Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the Execution!"

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A8 Sandra Reed during the rally:  
At my very first speech, I said that they, the state, may do what they plan to do. But they won't do it quietly. That was 23 years ago I said that. They wouldn't do it quiet. I was meant for the world to know what they have done to my son.

A9 Rodrick Reed during rally:  
We have a press conference in Dallas next week, and then when we get back from that, we will be doing stuff at the Governor's Mansion. That's gonna be like from the 30th to the fifth and then after the fifth we're going to L.A. to do the Dr. Phil show. then we go to Atlanta to the Georgia Supreme Court, then we're going back to Washington to U.S. Supreme Court. We're going to do all that, but I do need support. Yes, I do. We have a fundraiser. We have goals. We have not met those needs, but even if I don't meet the needs, you understand me, I'm getting to where I need to go

A10 If you are on social media, some of the hashtags that we are using are #FaceTheForensics, we're saying #BringRodneyHome, we're saying #TestTheDNA together on the shirt for FreeRodneyReed. So, we really want to drive people to pay attention to the forensic evidence in this case. We really want people to be talking about this case as much as possible, on their Twitter, on their Instagram, on their Facebook, whatever it is.

A11 But we have a voice today. We don't have to sit back. We've been set free to be able to let our voices be heard. And if we come together as a people to let our voices be heard, we will make a change. We can do something great in this community.

A12 Rodrick Reed during rally:  
I'm here to tell you that we have people stepping up. You people, other people in this are community stepping up. And slowly they are easing that knife (symbolic for brother's death sentence) out of my family so we breath so we can be whole again.

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## Appendix J - Needs, Obstacles, and Support Obtained Quotes

Need (R2), Obstacles (R3), and Support Obtained (R4) Quotes	
R2.1	Need: Removal from Death Row
N1	I wish that I still didn't have to do this. But he was denied last week at the Supreme Court, for what I don't know because he has horrible lawyers that don't tell us anything. I'm very mad about that whole situation.
R2.2	Need: Engaged and Skilled Appellate Representation
R3.2	Obstacles: Money, Incompetent Appellate Counsel, Lack Of Influence
Popular Codes: Legal Actants, Lack of Influence, Stress, Money, Appeals Attorney, Innocence, Law of Parties, TDCJ, Legislation, Organizing PR, Key Influence, Voice Amplification	
N2	We can't hire an attorney. They're not allowed to pick who their attorney is unless they find someone that's willing to pick up their case and then petition the court and if the court agrees... which we tried to do. I found someone that was willing to take his case. And he's really amazing and has gotten people off of death row. So, he petitioned the court and the judge denied it. The judge said that his current attorney could bring on a second chair and she's great. I love her.
N3	We're not in a financial position where we can pick up and find new lawyers. They want a \$3 million retainer. We've talked to lawyers... A \$3 million retainer, because they know what kind of work that they're going to do. I don't have that. And even if the family sold every single thing that we owned and lived homeless on the street, we couldn't even come up with a quarter of a million dollars between us, you know? Let alone 3 million.
R4.2	Support Obtained: Engaged and Skilled Appellate Representation
Popular Codes: Legal Actants, Appeals Attorney, Innocence	
N4	That's true. Well, we got VERY lucky because they had turned down my brother's case on several occasions, and we kept writing back and writing back. And it wasn't until I until the exonerate, came forward, and went to the Innocence Project for us.
N4	I'm seeing the inmates, and they've got new lawyers now. They're doing an innocence plan. And it works. It actually works. They've got a couple of them out.
R2.3	Need: Legislation Related to Removal from Death Row in Texas
R3.3	Obstacles: Unresponsive or Pro-Death Penalty Legislators, Lack of Public Support, Law

Popular Codes: Legislators, Society/Larger Community, Other Supporters of Capital Offenders, Non-profit Organizations	
N5	I wrote every single Texas representative, and begged them for support of the bill and begged them to like to intervene with the whole case thing that was going on. And normally, I don't get anywhere except for the standard response letter that comes.
N6	The initial letter we got from the representatives, there were 17 that signed on in support. That was sent to the pardons and parole board. We've gotten over 10,000 petition signatures, just going to different places, talking to different people about the case, about the "law of parties" because people don't know that you can be executed for something that somebody else did.
R4.3 Support Obtained: Legislation Related to Removal from Death Row in Texas	
Popular Codes: Legal Actants, Legislation, Key Influence, Voice Amplification	
N7	We had a Law of Parties Bill and an Abolition Bill. And Judge Alcala (former Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Judge) also came and testified. She does this all the time, she testified for us against the death penalty and against the Law of Parties.
R2.4	Need: Funding for Care
R3.4	Obstacles: Money, Offender Family and Friends
Popular Codes: Money, Commissary, Travel, Visits, Work, Commitment, Stress Organizing PR, Public Education, Difficult	
N8	I added it up, and it was over \$200,000 at one time for supporting him. I'm talking about the cost of sending him money, the cost of buying his commissary, the cost of gasoline, the cost of the rental car, the cost of a hotel room if needed. And, then you know, us having a meal on the road or whatever.
N9	I work a lot - three jobs. My third job basically goes to the death row. That's where my money goes.
N10	I would love to visit him more than I do. But we're talking like a four and a half to five hour if there is zero traffic and I'm driving at nighttime in the middle of the night and then it's the hotel room and then... You know what I'm saying? This is always a huge financial issue. Then you have to get a hotel room unless you drive up there and back on one day, and then you're gone for 20 hours of the day.
N11	You better take the day off if you're going to go make a visit. Don't have anything planned in the afternoon, because you can get there at eight o'clock in the morning and they don't bring him out till 10 am. then you have a two-hour visit, then you travel home.
N12	It's a struggle sometimes, especially if you don't have the money to go out and rally all the time or if you don't have the money to go out and you know, deliver

	those letters or if you don't have the money to go protest or whatever. It's, it's hard. This whole thing is so hard, but it's worth it.
R4.4	Support Obtained: Funding for Care
Popular Codes: Voice, Organizing, Other Supporters of Capital Offenders, Activist Org.	
R2.5	Need: Support Assistance from Offender Family and Friends
R3.5	Obstacles: Money, Travel, Stress, Death, Disinterest, Abandonment
Popular Codes: Money, Visits, Rejection, Offender Family, Self, Other Supporters of Capital Offenders, Commissary, Inclusivity	
N13	A lot of these guys, their family have abandoned them. For example, before his mother died, he was supported. When she was alive, she would make them (siblings) take her to see her son. When she died, they totally abandoned him. They would not go to see their sibling. And I mean, he was 23.
N14	We know a lot of guys that don't get food and don't get commissary and never get anything put on their accounts. And we have other inmates that will tell us like, "Hey, can Y'all please help...? His mom hasn't put anything on his books in the last three months, and he's hungry. She died.
N15	I think most of the inmates, their family dried up. They don't exist no more. And then you have them people that want to help them. But they're stuck here, and they can't actually be here to help the inmate. No liquid assets. She's paying her doctor bills and paying this, paying that. She don't have any money to pay him. I'm sorry. That's just the fact the life.
R2.6	Need: Voice Amplification
R3.6	Obstacles: media, lack of funding, lack of public support, and the existing harsh stigma
Popular codes: Activist, Family, Friends, Society/Larger Community, Legislators, Legal/Justice State Officials, Academic Research, Exoneree, Change, Voice, Public Education on Capital Punishment, Organizing, PR, Other Supporters of Capital Offenders	
N16	Anthony Graves, Exoneree. "Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the execution!"  How do our voices be heard? Everybody in here has a story. How does it become heard? Because that's what's going to change the system. Personal stories that have been directly affected by the criminal justice system moves this ball.
R4.6	Support Obtained: Voice Amplification
Popular Codes: Voice, Organizing, PR, Other Supporters of Capital Offenders, Activist Organizations	
N17	Cousin of Mark Soliz with Gloria Rubac. "Protest of Mark Soliz's Execution" Cousin: You said he can hear if we speak on the megaphone?

	Gloria: Uh uh. You want to talk?
	Cousin on megaphone: Mark, this is your cousin Monica. Jodi, Sonia, Bree, everybody in Fort Worth, everybody in Oklahoma. We love you. We'll see you, and if God say so you're not going nowhere. We pray for you, we love you. You are not here by yourself. Mark, we are with you. We love you (crying).
N18	Anthony Graves, Family Rally for Rodney Reed You don't have to sit on death row to have a story. This beautiful woman has a story (referring to Sandra Reed). Her son is sitting on death row. And she's been there with him ever since. The world needs to know that the media needs to know, the politician needs to know that.
R2.7	Need: Unbiased Media Coverage
R3.7	Obstacles: Lack of Influence, Stigma, True-Crime Culture
	Popular Codes: Humanize, Media, Society/Larger Community, Stigma, Powerlessness, Legal Actants, Frustration, Voice, Media, Mental Health, Emotional Abuse, Emotional Suffering
N19	They (media) do that on purpose to make them look like monsters, and people go "Killer! Killer! Killer! He's a monster he should be killed!" I can't even tell you how many times I've heard that term and I hate it, because of all of my brothers he is the most kind-hearted and would do ANYTHING for ANYBODY. He's one of the best people I know.
N20	We did exactly what our lawyers told us to do. Don't talk to anybody. Go there, visit him. Keep your head down. Don't cause problems and leave. So, I didn't befriend the family members. I didn't. You see what I'm saying? So, we just stayed quiet. We refuse all media because we were told to do that. And it turned out to be the worst thing for us
N21	I'm frustrated because I want the legal side to see the person that I know. So, I don't want them to see the Forensic Files side. I want them to see the person that I know. But it's so difficult in legal terms to get that across to anybody. You know, you want somebody from the Supreme Court or somebody a high up judge to come and visit with him. And just have a conversation with him.
N22	How do you humanize them? You know, if you do an interview with them, and put it on TV, they're still behind glass. They're still wearing a death row jumpsuit; they're sitting there behind the glass with the phone. That's not a human. That's an inmate. People go there out of kind of morbid curiosity. You want to make that person look like a person, not "look at me!" A circus freak or something, you know? We can't win.
N23	She tried to kill herself at that point in time because the news is "convicted killer," and "Your father is a murderer!" and "He's gonna murder my family!" and "He should die!" It's really that bad.
R4.7	Support Obtained: Unbiased Media Coverage
	Popular Codes: Media, Voice Amplification



N24	The idea is to give them a radio, so they can at least hear The Death Row Angels and new things coming up. You know, they are very abreast to everything that's going on. And tells them what's going on.
N25	The first hour guests are on the show, like maybe attorneys talk about new rulings that have come out or new laws that have come into effect. Keri Blakinger, who's a Houston Chronicle reporter, does a lot of the reporting from TDCJ and the wrong that TDCJ does.
R2.8	Need: Public Support
R3.8	Obstacles: Stigma, Lack of Supporters, Lack of Influence, Society/Larger Community
Popular Codes: Stigma, Society/Larger Community, Emotional Abuse, Emotional Suffering, Family, Friends, Rejection, Emotional Suffering, Judgement, Stress, Sad	
N26	This is the life where if you kind of want negativity and rudeness, this is what you get. You've picked the life for it. To be honest.
N27	I think it's just the whole death row thing because they're like, Oh, my God, he must be a monster! And then I'm just like, No he's not. He's a human... he's nice.
N29	We get hate mail. I can't even tell you about all the hate mail that we get, especially when he's on the news quite a bit. So, letters will come in all kinds of messages on Facebook, "fry him," "this motherfucker needs to be....," you know? And it goes on and on and on and on and on and "his family must be pieces of shit for him to be have turned out that way." I mean, I've heard it all. It's just so much emotional abuse for us from hateful people around the world.
N30	The area where I grew up, it's very judgmental. They're like, "Ew." My family is not very supportive of me. We just don't really talk about it, but I'll tell my friends. They're like, "Ummmmmm, no." So, I'm just like, "okay." Some people I'll text one day, and I haven't heard back from them yet, and that's years ago. I do have one or two friends from back home that are still around and ask about him and stuff, but not many people from home.
N31	Sigh. I have lost so many friends because of it. I've had strangers be more supportive than my friends had. It's just like, people think I'm putting my life on hold because of him. I'm just doing everything I wouldn't be doing any other time. I'm working. I'm doing what I want. My life's not on hold on. I'm fine.
N32	I tell my mom everything. But my dad's really quite judgmental. And he's kind of this type of person that has like boxes, and if you don't fit into those boxes, then he doesn't want to know. I need to eventually tell him and that did not go well. I called him and I said, "Look, I am in love and he's in prison." THAT didn't go down. Then I had to explain he was on death row. That went REALLY bad. He said, "I don't know what you're doing. I can't understand it." And he just was like, "I need to distance myself from the whole situation." So, I was like, "Okay." And that was that.

N33	[regarding family] They don't really ask about him. When I bring him up, they just kind of change the subject. And I'm just like, "well, he asked me to marry him," and they're just like, "Oh.... okay. Great." (in a mocking tone) I kind of learned over the years, unfortunately, just not bring him up. So, we don't talk about him because I don't want disrespect towards him because then that'll make me feel like crap. So, I just don't talk about it.
N34	Just my immediate family knows. My mom told me not to tell my other family.
R4.8	Support Obtained: Public Support
Popular Codes: Voice, Organizing, PR, Other Supporters of Capital Offenders, Visits, Positive, Offender, Strength, Love, Visits, Positive, Friend, Pen-pal Letters, Offender, Validation, Commitment, Religious Organization, God, Strength, Acceptance, Family, Change	
N35	Anthony Graves, Reed family rally. We have to continue this momentum. You have to keep this in their face. You have to let them know that they're not going to win. You cannot just tell us go sit down that you got this. No, no, no, no. You got this? WE GOT THIS!
N36	Jose Garza, Public Defender, Executive Director of Workers Defense Project, "March to Abolish the Death Penalty" Mark Soliz, who was executed last month, scored a 75 on his IQ test, and may well have suffered from an intellectual disability that should have rendered him ineligible for the death penalty. Randall May, he believes that the state wants to execute him because of his renewable energy design that threatens oil companies. Justin Hall suffers from major depressive disorder with psychotic features and bipolar disorder. He has a history of hallucinations and paranoid delusions. These stories are hard to talk about and even harder to hear. We have a responsibility to talk about them, and we have a responsibility to listen to them
N37	At that time, the death penalty was really not spoken of it very much. I asked if I could come and speak about the death penalty, and about my family's case, and hey allowed me to come to each one of the masses on several occasions and talk. So, we have generations of people that are praying for him, and then they send it to the prayer meetings and their different groups.
N38	What I noticed is like a lot of the younger people, the millennials and Generation X, they're interested. The older people are set in their ways.
N39	I want to say the whole picture is changing. There's people that don't want to have that [sic]. They don't want executions going on in Texas.
R2.9	Need: Mental Health and Emotional Support
R3.9	Obstacles: Stigma, Rejection From Family, Friends, or Society/Larger Community, Trauma, Stress, Emotional Suffering

Popular Codes: Stigma, Mental Health, Frustration, Society/Larger Community, Money, Stress, Anger, Appeals Attorney, Exhaustion, Powerlessness, Trauma, Death, Emotional Suffering, Commitment, Compassion, Sad, Love	
N40	We really do need emotional counselors. We're also victims of the whole system, and you know the children have it just as bad as we do, they're left with all of these things. We're considered monsters just like they are. You know, we've done several protests where people call us prison whores.
N41	(after 21 years of supporting) It all takes time, and it all takes money, and it all takes strength. THAT, I think I'm losing. And I'm just worn out.
N42	I'm getting ready to go to work. And it was 5:30 in the morning. And I see, you know, "It's so sad that [brother of supporter] was denied in the Supreme Court again, and I'm just like, "Whaaaaat??? And then, of course, that just started my whole day. So then, right then and there, I'm pounding the keys to talk to the lawyers, say "What in the world is going on?" You know? "How come you didn't tell us anything? What did you even file?" You know? Nothing. We know nothing.
N43	I struggle with a lot, of course, and getting him through execution is very, very hard on me. But I'm still there, and I will go with them to the end and I'm not going to back out. He didn't want me to be a witness. And I told him, I said, "I don't know what that experience is because I've never been a witness. But the only thing I do know is I can't let you die by yourself (crying).
N44	If he could have sat up, he would have sat straight up. He raised his hand, and you could tell it was like he was having trouble breathing, but he couldn't put his hand up there because he was like... I said that medicine was taking his breath away and suffocating him. And that, that was really hard on me. That's when I had nightmares for several nights. Every time I go to sleep, I would see him struggling.
N45	For me, when they let me know that he had a date... terrible, horrible, horrible. It's a horrible experience and it doesn't mean that they're going to die because they can always have a stay, but honestly, if they give them a stay with the probability of them getting off death row, that's well, that's okay. But if they give them a stay so that they get another date, a few weeks later or a few days later, that's torture. That is torture because you go through the last visit and then they give them a stay. And then a few weeks later, they got another day. Again. It's, it's really bad.
R4.9 Support Obtained: Mental Health and Emotional Support	
Popular Codes: Visits, Positive, Offender, Strength, Offender, Love, Visits, Positive, Committed, Friend, Pen-pal Letters, Offender, Validation, God, Strength, Commitment, Religious Organization, Strength, Acceptance, Family	
N46	I go down there, and I talked to my brother and he encourages me every time I go down. I go down, to lift him up, and he's lifting me up

- N47 Just being around him. I get to spend time with him every week. It's just two hours, but it's better than not being here at all. So anytime I can get with him, I'm taking it. He's helped me through a lot. I still treat him as if he were out here. I'll talk to him about things that are going on. He'll give me lots of advice. So, I get my best friend around.
- N48 I keep paintings and drawings. I get a lot of and they make special cards. They make the cards themselves. And I keep all the cards and any pictures that they send me, I have tons and tons of in my heart. Because when I go visit, they always said that's their way of thanking me because they don't have money to give me for treats.
- N49 That is why God put us here. We firmly believe that. That we were put here together for a reason, and that is to abolish the death penalty.
- N50 I feel like that's one of the things in the Bible they say is that we need to visit prisoners. And that's what I do. The minister, she's very supportive. In fact, she calls me a missionary. That's what she says I am, and she said that she admires me for what I do.
- N51 Our pastor said you guys have deep roots in this land. And when the wind blows, you're going to stay strong. You're going to get through this and that's what we're doing. We are getting through this. Today we are standing up. We're going to continue to stand up. That we've been standing up for 21 years but we're going to continue to stand up. We've shouted it from the rooftops. We've shouted all across the world, all across the country
- N52 I went into my mom's room, and I just remember seeing my dad's rosary. And they were both praying on the bed. So, I went in there and I joined them. And, one by one, we all fought all day and then we prayed for about an hour. Just thanking God for giving him a stay. You know, praying for strength for us to keep going, you know, even if it did happen.
- N53 I have a lot of people that I've met. Like this TDCJ support group on Facebook. I met a lot of those girls in person. I've been friends with them the longest, probably out of everybody.
- N54 Everybody else. All the organization though the families and the guys themselves, you know, as they write and they write letters, you know to be read and. But the family is for sure... I love everybody. And that's, that's why I mean, all of them. And you're talking about like the Delia, Gloria, Lilly, Scott, Lilly's husband Mike. The Reeds, all of the Reeds, the entire family (laughing). I'm practically part of their family I love them so much.
- N55 Rodrick Reed, Reed Justice Initiative. "Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the execution!"
- And we are not going to stop. We're going to be an organization for the death row community, for those in this situation. We may not have a lot of money right now. But we do have knowledge we do have experience that we have been to this for 23 years, we can kind of guide them along the way just a little bit to help them see their way through darkness hold your hand up

N56	<p>Delia Perez Myers, Sister of Louis Perez death row inmate. “Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the execution!”</p> <p>I am most grateful today for the organization called the Witness to Innocence, beloved exonerees who are here, who have stood by our side every step of the way. Attending our marches, our meetings, coming to our families, and sharing their love and their support. Being there for us when we needed a shoulder to cry on.</p>
R2.10	Need: Better Prison Conditions
R3.10	Obstacles: TDCJ, Polunsky Unit, Lack of Influence, Warden Ombudsman, Money
Popular Codes: TDCJ, Legal Actants, Legislators, Activist Organizations, Academic Research, Mental Health, TDCJ, Polunsky Conditions, Frustration, Stress, Commissary, Visits, Emotional Suffering, Witness Trauma, Love	
N57	They just don't have that there. They don't have counseling in general. They say they do. They don't. And they need to provide that. Everybody has issues there.
N58	He gets a mood where he wants to give up, and he just wants them to kill him. I didn't get any support from TDCJ at all until I testified before a prison board meeting. First, I have to deal with the fact that he's innocent and they're going to kill him. Now I have to deal with the fact that he wants to kill himself and I have to worry about his eternal soul. Because my family is Christian, and we have certain beliefs and I know he was planning on doing something stupid. he just couldn't get out of this funk.
N59	He's gone to Jester a couple of times. And there's counselors over there. But the counselors aren't good over there. And just report for the mentally ill.
N60	They've been without toothbrushes for like three months now at the unit. So, and there's not been any on eComm. Their toothbrushes are just little tiny things, and they break. They can't just buy a toothbrush when they want to, or toothpaste. Sometimes they're out of toothpaste. So, they don't take care of their teeth properly, their teeth getting bad and they end up with no teeth. Terrible that all their teeth have gotten pulled!
N61	I have someone right now that's going crazy because of the conditions. He went in fine. He's losing his mind. Oh, yes. he's talking to himself. They talk to themselves. They answer himself. he's pacing up and down he's going crazy. Yeah, and he's only been on there what maybe six seven years. He's loving he's mentally he's getting mentally ill I think.
N62	He said, “the glass, it's like it's mocking you. It's so transparent, and you're there. You're right in front of me, but it's just there and we can't do anything. Just to hold your hand would be amazing.” And you think, for somebody to crave something so simple because they haven't had human contact for so long. It's sad.

N63	(crying) Very cruel. I understand why they wouldn't let us hug them; you know? We'd never let them go. You know, the officers are gonna have a very hard time separating us. It's very hard. Very, very hard.
R4.10	Support Obtained: Better Prison Conditions
Popular Codes: Non-profit Organization, Legislator, Key Influence, Media, Voice Amplification, Visit, Health, Neglect	
N64	I reached out to my representative to help get him get medical care, and he actually went to the unit itself, saw what was going on, and said that he needed to be treated.
N65	There's a program called Texas Cure, which is a private organization that is furnishing the fans, all we have to do is send them the name of the inmate, their TC number, and what unit they're at. And they have a fan delivered to them.
N66	Keri Blakinger (Houston Chronicle journalist) was also instrumental in the heat problem. She got some attorneys that agreed to take the TDCCJ on about the heat. And now, they haven't completely got everything settled, but now the guys can have two fans instead of one because the fans are not very big (Cole vs. Collier, 2019).
R2.11	Need: Fair Officials and Processes
R3.11	Obstacles: Apathetic State Officials, Texas Governor, Legislators, TDCJ, BPP, Warden, Ombudsman
Popular Codes: Activist, Family, Friends, Society/Larger Community, Legislators, Legal/Justice State Officials, Academic Research, Warden, Ombudsman, Powerlessness, Legislation, Frustration, TDCJ, Polunsky Unit, Voice, Ombudsman	
N67	To the warden, and writing the ombudsman's office, which they're supposed to address any issues, but they always come back supporting them themselves, you know, because they're part of the prison. There was this last session to move that out of the prison and more as an independent group, but I don't believe it passed.
N68	We need insight we need we need somebody else that overlooks the Ombudsman. You have an outside person, not in the BBP to monitor them because they're not doing what they should do.
N69	We have an ombudsman that we can reach out to if there's like a big issue, or we can reach out to the warden. But every time I reached out to the ombudsman, they were like, "We've done nothing wrong." So, it's just like, why do I even bother?
N70	They don't even need a reason to ban you for visits. Because when they banned me for the keychain from Bath and Body Works, they didn't question me, they said, "Sorry, it's security risk. We can't take that chance. So, your banned." I've been banned several times for bullshit reasons.
N71	They cut us down, and now we're only allowed three minutes to talk. So, you're trying to get all the important points possible in a three minutes, to give a face

	<p>to the family. Sometimes it doesn't work and especially when you get emotional, like I just, I try not to cry, but sometimes I do and then oh, damn, my three minutes are gone So trying to address issues for all of us there, we each got less than a minute.</p> <p>So, they didn't hear us. I took all that time off, and for nothing, you know, and they didn't hear us. They argued with me.</p>
R2.12	Need: Public Education on Capital Punishment
R3.12	Obstacles: Ignorance on Texas Death Penalty, Media, Stigma, Rejection, Harassment, Isolation
	Popular Codes: Other Supporters of Capital Offenders, Society/Larger Community, Social Media, Activist Organizations, Religious Organizations, Academia, Public Education on Capital Punishment, Exoneree, Change, Voice, Polunsky Conditions
N72	<p>I feel like a lot of them (Texans) don't pay attention to the death penalty. Because you'll go to Huntsville, and you'll be like, "I'm here for an execution," and they're like, "they don't do executions here." Or you're in Livingston, and people are asking you why you're there, and you're like, "Oh, my husband's on death row." "Death rows not here." "Yes, it is." They don't know about it. I don't know if they don't pay attention or if they just follow Governor Abbott and Governor Perry and all those people that are for the death penalty.</p>
N73	<p>Maybe I would have been anti-death penalty much faster if I had gotten to know that injustice happened more than just in our case, right? Because surely, it was a fluke. And this does not happen in our system. You know? Nothing can possibly go as wrong as this did. But it does. It happens all the time.</p>
N74	<p>Anthony Graves, Exoneree. "Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the execution!"</p> <p>When I tell my story (exoneration), people come up to me and say, "Listen, I'm a Republican. And I believe in the death penalty until I just heard your story. And I want to know what can I do? What organization can I join to make sure that this doesn't happen again?"</p>
N75	<p>The first dates that just got a few years ago, they took all of his possessions away from him. Everything absolutely everything that he owned, they took it away from him. And then when he got the stay, you know, we had to help replace it. And I think that's the other thing that people don't understand. And that they get all twisted. They're just like, "Oh, well, you know, they're in there. They get to do this, they get that..." No, no, they do not. If we don't send money to him. People literally have nothing.</p>
R4.12	Support Obtained: Public Education on Capital Punishment
	Popular Codes: Other Supporters of Capital Offenders, Society/Larger Community, Social Media, Activist Organizations, Religious Organizations, Academia, Public Education on Capital Punishment, Exoneree, Change, Voice, Polunsky Conditions

- N76 When you give the state to the power to kill with no consequences, you're doing damage. People just don't realize that but I'm trying to reach them. One life at a time, one student at a time.
- N77 Nick Been, Kids Against the Death Penalty (KADP), "March to Abolish the Death Penalty"
- I speak to kids on the injustices of the death penalty, and I'm still a family member of an innocent man on death row. I've been speaking about the evils of the death penalty. I have traveled the world and come to find that many people oppose the death penalty in all forms and fashion.
- N78 Ron Kleine, Witness to Innocence. "Rally for Justice for Rodney Reed! Stop the execution!"
- I'll tell you what, the hundreds of cases that I've read on death row, I've only found six cases where a prosecutor has ever admitted that he did wrong. All the rest of them stand on their roles. All they say, No, we had the right guy. We know what he did." But they don't want the truth. Brady, which has no teeth in the law, Brady says you can't hide the evidence, among other things, but the problem with Brady is, well, that's just a suggestion. That's exactly what the law is, a suggestion.
- N79 I talk to friends and family about what I do. At my job. Like I tell my boss, I tell my cousins when I'm working at night, making tamales at my third job. I tell them what I'm doing, and they asked a lot of questions.
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