



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
**WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM**

BILL NUMBER: <b>HB 129</b>		DATE: <b>2/12/2025</b>	
COMMITTEE: <b>Judiciary</b>			
<b>TESTIFYING:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>ARNIE C. "HONEST-ABE" DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>arniedienoff@yahoo.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>In-Person</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/11/2025 11:52 PM</b>	
<b>THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.</b>			



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>BRIAN BERNSKOETTER</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-636-2522</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>COLE COUNTY COMMISSION</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>100 E. HIGH</b>			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65101</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/11/2025 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>JON E. BEETEM</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/11/2025 12:00 AM</b>	
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>GWEN SMITH</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>314-324-9656</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>EMPOWER MISSOURI</b>		TITLE: <b>CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY MANAGER</b>	
ADDRESS:			
CITY: <b>ST. LOUIS</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>63116</b>
EMAIL: <b>gwen@empowermissouri.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>2/11/2025 10:39 AM</b>
<b>THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.</b>			

As the largest and oldest anti-poverty non-profit in our state, Empower Missouri is committed to improving the quality of life for all Missouri residents through advocacy. Since our inception, Empower Missouri has focused on the criminal justice system and its impacts. **HB 129** would create a taxpayer fund to reimburse counties for the costs of sequestering juries when a change of venue happens in first-degree murder cases only when the death penalty is sought. Empower Missouri and the Community Justice Coalition strongly believe that Missouri's public safety dollars should be invested in programs proven to keep communities safe, rather than spending taxpayer dollars to support increased usage of the death penalty. Instead of creating a fund to preserve the death penalty system, we urge the legislature to look at how it is applied. In Missouri, the death penalty is usually pursued in only a handful of counties, though all taxpayers share the expense. 40% of those currently on death row in our state are from two of Missouri's 114 counties (25% - St. Louis County and 15% - Boone County). The disparate and highly clustered use of the death penalty by certain counties raises serious questions of unequal and arbitrary application of the law. Each decision to seek the death penalty is made by a single county district attorney, but all state taxpayers bear the substantial financial costs of each death penalty case. The cost of sequestering a jury in a capital case is one of the many hidden costs of the death penalty system. More than a dozen states have tried to capture the cost of death penalty cases and found evidence that they are up to 10 times more expensive than other comparable cases. Instead of passing legislation for change of venue cases, Missouri should do a full audit of the death penalty system to fully understand all of the hidden costs of this government program, which spends millions of public safety dollars and is proven not to deter crime. Empower Missouri respectfully asks the committee to oppose HB 129. Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter. Source: Wasteful and Inefficient: The alarming cost of the death penalty. Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty. 2020.