

Colorado Mennonite investigator jailed for refusing to testify in death penalty case

**Greta Lindecrantz sees her work in legal defense as opposing execution as punishment, her pastor said, so she doesn't want to aid the prosecution.**

by [Celeste Kennel-Shank](#) in the [March 28, 2018](#) issue



Greta Lindecrantz. Photo by Arapahoe County, Colorado, Sheriff's Office.

A district judge in Arapahoe County, Colorado, found Greta Lindecrantz in contempt of court and put her in jail on February 26 for refusing on religious grounds to be a witness for the prosecution as it sought to reconfirm a death sentence at an appeals hearing.

Lindecrantz is a member of [Beloved Community Mennonite Church](#), in Englewood, Colorado, which is part of a tradition opposed to executions. Vern Rempel, the congregation's pastor, said that Lindecrantz sees her work as an investigator with legal defense teams as "resisting the use of the death penalty." In this case, the prosecution is compelling her to testify about her investigative work in the case of a man who has been convicted of ordering two murders, according to news reports.

Before her court appearance, Rempel counseled Lindecrantz and invited her to address the congregation about whether she would testify for the prosecution in any form.

"She agonized over it and then came to a sense of clarity," he said. "You could hear it in her voice and see it in her face."

Lindecrantz and her attorney have suggested compromises, such as testifying in front of the judge rather than for the prosecution, but they were rejected. The judge has written that "allowing people to refuse to participate in death penalty cases on religious grounds would disrupt the justice system," the *Denver Post* reported.

Nancy Leong, a law professor at the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law, told the newspaper that the prosecution could change its mind about whether it needs Lindecrantz to testify.

However, Leong said, "it's well-established First Amendment law that any kind of religious view does not provide an exemption to criminal law."

Members of Beloved Community Mennonite Church and other local Mennonite congregations gathered each day and sang hymns outside of the Arapahoe County Detention Center. They are also taking this as "a Kairos moment" in responding to the death penalty in their state, Rempel said.

"Since that is one of Greta's great causes, it's a way we can support her," he said.

While Rempel and other Mennonites are seeking to bear witness to their beliefs, they also hope to build relationships with people who have different views.

“These things quickly turn into two sides: Are you opposed to the death penalty or are you for it? I don’t think that’s going to get us where we want to go,” he said.

“The principalities and powers want to suck us into a polarized debate so that nothing gets done.”

**FOLLOWING UP (Updated April 6):** Greta Lindecrantz, who was jailed in late February for refusing on religious grounds to be a witness for the prosecution in a Colorado death penalty case, was released after she agreed to testify. The congregation where she is a member, Beloved Community Mennonite Church, wrote on its website that she was allowed to leave the Arapahoe County Detention Center after answering questions from the prosecution on March 14. She “agreed to testify at the request of the defense but primarily at the request of Robert Ray, who is on death row.” Mari Newman, Lindecrantz’s attorney, said in a statement printed in the *Denver Post* that her client changed her position after learning from Ray’s defense “that not obtaining her testimony will adversely affect Mr. Ray’s likelihood of securing a legal remedy to spare his life.”

*A version of this article, which was edited on March 23, appears in the print edition under the title “People: Greta Lindecrantz.”*