

## **Why Oregon UU Voices for Justice should make abolishing the death penalty a priority issue for 2013**

- **The U.S. is the only country in the Americas to conduct executions.** According to Amnesty International, only China, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia execute more people. **But, the US, with its death penalty (DP), still has a higher murder rate than other developed countries** without it.
- **There is no evidence that the death penalty is a deterrent to murder.** States with a death penalty have consistently had higher murder rates over the past 20 years than those states without the death penalty. FBI murder rate statistics show these figures clearly.
- The South, which accounts for 80% of executions, repeatedly has the highest murder rate and the Northeast, which accounts for less than 1% of executions, has the lowest murder rate.
- Since restoration of the DP in the US in 1976, there have been 1,295 executions – but there have been 141 exonerations (proven mistakes) too! That means, ***for every nine executions, there has been one exoneration.*** Would we tolerate that error rate with surgeons or the airline industry? We can't know how many innocent people may have been executed before their innocence was shown. Recently, Troy Davis (GA) could have been one; Todd Willingham (TX) could have been. DPIC has identified nine other cases where strong evidence exists. The 141 people later exonerated spent an average of 9.8 years on death row.
- In national polls, public support for the DP has shifted, with a growing number of people favoring penalties other than death. A “Smart on Crime” survey of 500 police chiefs point out that the DP does not deter violent crime and is wasteful of resources that could curb violent crime and reduce the murder rate; leading criminologists agree. Find both studies at [www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)
- 17 states, DC, and Puerto Rico have no DP. The other states, the US Government/military still use the DP as the most severe punishment for aggravated murder. But with more exonerations occurring, states are using the DP less. The 46 executions in 2010 were a 12% decline over 2009, and 54% drop since 2000. Death sentences in 2010 were 114 compared to 234 in 2000.
- Amnesty International studies say that nine in ten people facing the DP cannot afford their own attorneys. Many states fail to meet American Bar Association standards for appointment, performance and compensation of counsel for indigent prisoners. In part, this is because **death prosecutions are much costlier than in cases where the state seeks a “true life” (life without parole) sentence.** A North Carolina study found \$2.16 million more in costs per execution than non-death cases with a true-life sentence.

Issue statement for Oregon UU Voices for Justice, November 2012;

For more information go to [www.deathpenaltyinfo.com](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.com) or [www.oadp.org](http://www.oadp.org) or call Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (OADP) (503) 990-7060

- In *Ford v Wainwright* (1986), the Supreme Court established that the DP is unconstitutional when imposed on a person deemed insane or incompetent to stand trial. *Atkins v Virginia* established executing someone with “mental retardation” (“intellectual disability”) violates the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment ban on cruel and unusual punishment. *The National Alliance on Mental Illness estimated that 5-10% of death row inmates have serious mental illness.*
- The DP is applied in a racially disparate way at every level in the US. Of the nearly 3,300 inmates on death row today, 56% are people of color (44% are black). And **race is a factor throughout the process**: First, prosecutors are more likely to initiate the DP process in cases where the victim is white and the suspected person is black. Studies show that the defendant is four times more likely to get the DP for murder of a white person than for killing a black person.
- Over 75% of the murder victims in cases leading to an execution were white, while only 50% of murder victims nationally are white. Race also affects the composition and behavior of juries. In “black on white” murder cases, juries with six or more white male jurors issue a DP sentence 78.3% of the time. Another level of racial disproportionality is reflected in executions. 12.9% of the U.S. population is black, but 34% of inmates executed since 1976 have been black.
- A California study showed that housing on death row costs \$90,000/year more than housing for those serving true life. The California Commission on Fair Administration of Justice estimate that the state’s current annual cost related to the death penalty approached \$137 million annually. If compared to a system of life without parole the costs to the state would be \$11.5 million annually. See more cost studies at [www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org). (With support of former DP advocates, California just voted on replacing the DP with true life in the general election.)
- Many victim family members do not support the death penalty. They do not find “closure” when another person is killed. An execution only continues the cycle of violence and creates another victim family. An execution does not honor the memory of a murdered loved one for many family members. The membership of both Murder Victim Families for Reconciliation (MVFR) and Murder Victim Families for Human Rights (MVFHR) advocate alternatives to the DP.
- Alternatives to the death penalty include life without parole, life with parole after 30 years, cognitive rehabilitation, benefits and restitution for victim families, rehabilitation programs for the addicted, education and counseling for offenders, and strict confinement for violent offenders/psychopaths incapable of living with others.

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