



Replace the Death Penalty with Life Incarceration

The ACLU of Washington supports legislation that eliminates the death penalty in favor of life incarceration without the possibility of parole.

The death penalty in Washington has proven costly and unfair, and has not resulted in a reduction in crime. It's time to follow other states' lead and stop wasting millions of our tax dollars on a capital punishment system that is broken beyond repair.

The death penalty's costs to Washington taxpayers are staggering.

It is far more expensive to execute someone convicted than it is to sentence that person to life imprisonment without possibility of parole. The prosecution and defense of capital cases costs \$467,000 more per case than noncapital cases. A capital case also involves increased court costs, as well as the need for a high-security, expensive death row—dollars our state could use to help victims' families in a time of fiscal crisis.

The death penalty does not make us safer.

Study after study has shown that the death penalty does not deter crime. And states without the death penalty have much lower murder rates. The South accounts for 80% of U.S. executions but has the highest regional murder rate.

The death penalty is unfair.

Because of the high cost of seeking the death penalty, prosecutors in various counties differ widely on whether to seek it. So an individual's likelihood of being sentenced to die depends on where his or her crime was committed. For example, Gary Ridgeway was convicted of

multiple murders and got a life sentence—while others got the death penalty for lesser crimes.

The death penalty is also racially biased. In Washington, prosecutors have sought death sentences almost three times as often if one or more of the victims was white.

The risk of mistakes is too great.

The death penalty poses an unacceptable risk of executing the innocent. Since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1977, at least 124 men and women have been released from death row nationally—some only minutes away from execution. It is likely that innocent individuals have been executed, and such mistakes are irreversible.

Life without parole is a sensible alternative to the death penalty.

A sentence of life without parole means exactly what it says—those convicted of crimes are locked away in prison until they die. However, unlike the death penalty, a sentence of life without parole allows mistakes to be corrected or new evidence to come to light. And life without parole is far less expensive.

Other states are repealing the death penalty.

New Mexico and New Jersey became the most recent states to repeal the death penalty, joining Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Washington should follow their lead and replace its death penalty with a fairer, more sensible system.