

PENNSYLVANIA'S DEATH PENALTY



**CATHOLIC
MOBILIZING
NETWORK**

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

The Facts

- 158 people currently on death row
- 3 executions since 1976
- 1040 executions before 1976
- Jury decides the sentence
- Life without parole is a sentencing option
- Method of execution: lethal injection
- 6 innocent persons released from death row

Moratorium

On February 13, 2015 Pennsylvania governor Tom Wolf announced a moratorium on all executions in the state. Governor Wolf joined the governors of Oregon, Washington, and Colorado in placing a hold on executions because of concerns about the death penalty system.

Public Opinion

A poll by Public Policy Polling showed:

- A majority of Pennsylvanians find some form of a life sentence to be preferable to the death penalty
- More people support the death penalty moratorium than oppose it
- 70% wrongly believe that life without parole is the more expensive punishment

Racial Bias

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Justice System found:

- People of color make up 11% of the state's population
- People of color make up two-thirds of Pennsylvania's death row

Pennsylvania's Bishops Stand Against Capital Punishment

The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference issued a statement welcoming Governor Tom Wolf's announcement of a moratorium on executions. This is an excerpt: "The Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania have long been advocating for an end to the death penalty in Pennsylvania because the modern penal system provides alternatives to taking the lives of the guilty. Punishment should reflect our belief in the inherent human dignity of each person, and taking a life to avenge the death of another does not create a culture of life."

INNOCENT MAN SENTENCED TO DIE

Harold Wilson served 16 years on Pennsylvania's death row for a crime he did not commit. He was acquitted, based on DNA evidence, in 2005. He said: "Is the death penalty worth killing one innocent person? Was it worth killing me?"

PENNSYLVANIA VOICES

-**Mamie Norwood**, whose husband, Amos, was murdered recently wrote a letter to two state officials asking them to stop the execution of her husband's killer, Terry Williams.

-**Terence Inch**, a former police commissioner in Hellam Township, Pennsylvania, recently wrote in support of the moratorium on executions and pointed to the mistakes that can happen in high profile crimes.

COSTLY SYSTEM

The state has spent \$350 million on the death penalty over the past few decades while carrying out just three executions

The Church and State Speak

The Church Speaks

Catechism of the Catholic Church

"The Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that 'the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person' and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide." (CCC 2267)

Evangelium Vitae

Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical on human dignity, challenges us to be "unconditionally pro-life.": "The case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform." (*Evangelium Vitae*, 27)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

"Its [the death penalty] application is deeply flawed and can be irreversibly wrong, is prone to errors and is biased by factors such as race, the quality of legal representation and where the crime was committed." (*A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*, USCCB, 2005)

Words of the Popes

Pope Francis: "Rendering justice' does not mean seeking punishment for its own sake, but ensuring that the basic purpose of all punishment is the rehabilitation of the offender." *World Congress Against the Death Penalty*, June 22, 2016

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: "Society's leaders should make every effort to eliminate the death penalty and to reform the penal system in a way that ensures respect for the prisoners' human dignity." *Benin, Africa*, Nov. 19, 2011

The States Speak

Innocence

- Nationally, over 160 people have been exonerated from death row.
- For every nine executions carried out in the United States, one person has been found to be innocent.

Racial Bias

- 76% of death row defendants have been executed for killing white victims, even though African--Americans make up about half of all homicide victims.

Criminalization of Mental Illness and Intellectual Disabilities

- A study in the *Hastings Law Journal* of recent executions found that "over half of the last one hundred executed offenders have been diagnosed with or displayed symptoms of mental illness."
- The Supreme Court banned the execution of those with intellectual disabilities but states have significantly deviated from accepted clinical methods for determining intellectual disability.

Overrepresentation of the Poor

- The majority of individuals on death row could not afford their own attorney. In many cases, the appointed attorneys are overworked, underpaid, or lacking the trial experience required for death penalty cases.

Costly Public Policy

- Multiple studies have shown the cost of trial sentencing, appeals and imprisonment to be much higher in capital cases versus life in prison without parole.

Geographic Basis

- 2% of all U.S. counties have produced 56% of the U.S. death row population



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