



Murder Victims' Families For Human Rights

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We Oppose the Death Penalty Because:

The death penalty process is fraught with error: Well over 100 innocent men and women have been released from death rows all over the country, exonerated of crimes they did not commit. Some were tortured into confessing, some had incompetent counsel, some were simply targeted because they were easy to prosecute and convict. Inconceivably, almost none of these errors were found through the regular appeals process but through the efforts of independent activists. Ultimately, it does victims no good to convict the innocent.

The administration of the death penalty is capricious and arbitrary: Less than two percent of murder cases are prosecuted as capital cases. It is often the attitude of local prosecutors that determines whether the death penalty will be sought rather than any statutory guidelines. This prosecutorial discretion differentiates victims in ways that we find unacceptable. Consistent sentencing with Life Without Parole as one option for the most heinous offenders is far more just and equitable.

Capital punishment is particularly open to abuse: The use of coerced confessions, jailhouse snitches, lack of racially diverse juries, and other examples of misconduct within the criminal justice system raise serious questions of credibility. Our criminal justice system should not operate in this manner. We must eliminate this high-stakes game from our society.

The death penalty does not deter crime: States without the death penalty have homicide rates below the national average. Canada, which has not had the death penalty since the 1970's and which is demographically most similar to the United States, has much lower crime rates. And, of course, the irony is not lost on us that the death penalty did not prevent the murder of our loved ones.

The death penalty is racist in its application: A disproportionate number of people on death rows are people of color. Furthermore, reliable studies show that the race of the victim plays the most statistically significant role in who gets the death penalty.

The death penalty wastes money: Life imprisonment is dramatically more cost efficient than executions. The mandatory capital appeals process and the infrastructure necessary to support the nation's death chambers make the death penalty far more expensive to administer, to the amount of millions of dollars per case. Money and resources wasted on capital punishment should be used for effective crime prevention measures and victim services.

The death penalty does not serve victims' family members: There is no such thing as “closure,” and the death penalty diverts resources that could genuinely help victims. It encourages families to cling to anger and expend precious energy waiting to see the state kill the killers in the belief that the execution, if and when it comes, will somehow make them feel better. The death penalty makes the offender the entire focus of the system, often marginalizing the victims entirely. Furthermore, many victims oppose the death penalty and this can lead to families and friends being deeply divided on the issue and unable to support one another.

The death penalty traumatizes all who come in contact with it: It has been shown that those involved with the capital punishment system - jurors, corrections officers, witnesses to the execution, families of the victims, and families of the condemned - are deeply traumatized by it. The deliberate and premeditated act of killing another human being is in complete opposition to the core values of humanity. No healthy person can possibly be unaffected by it.

Killing is wrong, no matter who does the killing: Victims' families, above all, know this. Executions create another circle of loss. The politically charged death penalty process sometimes manipulates victims to promote its own goals and ignores them if the wishes of the victims' families do not advance a particular political agenda. Victims deserve our best, and not a response to their tragedy that simply replicates the act that victimized them in the first place.

The death penalty is internationally recognized as a violation of human rights: It is in opposition to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Other nations refuse to extradite prisoners to the United States because they may receive the death penalty for their crimes. The United States, China, and a very few others are pariahs in the world community as they alone continue to use the death penalty.

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights (MVFHR) is a non-governmental organization with a national and international mission to abolish the death penalty. Its members are family members of homicide victims who oppose the death penalty, and family members of the executed and victims of government supported “disappearances.” Associate Membership is open to anyone who supports our mission and wishes to work with us or receive information on our activities.

MVFHR's members are some of the highest profile activists in the anti-death penalty movement. The MVFHR's Speakers Bureau can provide powerful, thought-provoking speakers for your group and organization.

If you would like more information on why we oppose the death penalty, or would like information on becoming a member or associate member, please contact:

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