

RHODE ISLAND'S DEATH PENALTY



**CATHOLIC
MOBILIZING
NETWORK**

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

The Facts

- Rhode Island was one of the first states to abolish the death penalty in 1852.
- The death penalty was reinstated for the crime of murder while serving a life sentence in 1873 and then expanded in 1972 to be mandatory for any murder committed while in a state penitentiary.
- Rhode Island abolished the death penalty in 1984.
- The last execution in Rhode Island took place in 1845 under a highly anti-Irish and anti-immigrant court, as show in case records, a pardon was issued to the executed John Gordon after more discoveries of posthumous action.

For more resources:

Faithful Citizenship Rhode Island:
<http://www.faithfulcitizenri.org/>

GOVERNOR ACTIONS IN RHODE ISLAND

Governor Lincoln Chafee protected Jason Pleau from being subject to the federal death penalty by having him plead guilty to murder and robbery charges in Rhode Island where he would receive a sentence of life without parole.

BISHOPS OF RHODE ISLAND STATEMENT REGARDING THE DEATH PENALTY

The Bishops of Rhode Island came out against the death penalty in stating the following: “In our society, the imposition of the death penalty is no longer an adequate and justifiable way of dealing with the problem of serious crime in our midst.” (1976)

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",[1] 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.
- African-Americans are overrepresented on death row. They makeup 13% of the US population but constitute 42% of death row.

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

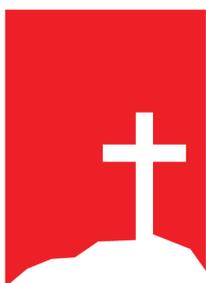
- The majority of individuals on death row could not afford their own attorney. In many cases, the appointed attorneys are overworked , underpaid, or lacking the trial experience required for death penalty cases.

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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