

# WASHINGTON'S DEATH PENALTY



**CATHOLIC  
MOBILIZING  
NETWORK**

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.  
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

## The Facts

- 8 people currently on death row
- 5 executions since 1976
- 105 executions before 1976
- Death penalty not currently a sentencing option
- Life without parole is a sentencing option
- Method of execution is lethal injection or hanging
- 1 person released from death row based on evidence of innocence
- 0 people granted clemency

## Leaders call for death penalty repeal

Governor Inslee imposed a moratorium on executions in 2014. Attorney General Bob Ferguson (D) and former Attorney General Rob McKenna (R) held a press conference in 2017, calling for the end of the death penalty. In 2018, King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg called for repeal, stating that the death penalty law in Washington is broken and cannot be fixed.

## 2018 Legislative Session

Washington's death penalty law was nearly repealed in the 2018 legislative session. The bill passed the Senate with bipartisan support, passed a House committee, but didn't make it to the House floor in time for a vote during the year's short session.

## Washington's Bishops Stand Against Capital Punishment

In January of 2014, when Washington Governor Jay Inslee imposed a moratorium on all executions, the Bishops of Washington state praised the declaration by raising awareness that there needs to be "a public conversation on capital punishment..." and, "...we favor abolishing the death penalty, but also recognize the obstacles to achieving the goal...We therefore pledge our assistance by working to raise awareness among Catholic people and all people of good will about the moral and practical reasons for ending executions in our state."

For more resources:

Washington Catholic Conference:

[www.thewsc.org](http://www.thewsc.org)

Washington Coalition Against the Death Penalty:

[www.abolishdeathpenalty.org](http://www.abolishdeathpenalty.org)

## WASHINGTON'S COSTLY SYSTEM

Washington is, along with every other state with the death penalty, spending a tremendous amount of money by retaining the failed death penalty system. In fact, replacing the death penalty with life imprisonment without the possibility of parole would save counties \$2 million annually in prosecution, defense, and witness costs alone.

## MURDER VICTIMS' FAMILY MEMBERS

The death penalty does not bring loved ones back, and any "closure" that comes from an execution is often fleeting and insufficient. The pain and suffering murder victims' family members experience from the loss of their loved one is only exacerbated by long, drawn-out death penalty trials. Countless murder victims' family members oppose the death penalty because they recognize it does not bring true healing and merely fosters vengeance.

# The Church and State Speak

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## 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*

### <sup>27</sup> 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



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## 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