

END THE DEATH PENALTY

The death penalty is an expensive, ineffective, and unjust government program that risks making irreversible mistakes by executing innocent people, delays justice for victims' families, and wastes millions of dollars that could be better used on programs that actually save lives and increase public safety.

INNOCENT PEOPLE FACE EXECUTION

At least 166 people have been exonerated from death rows across the country. That's approximately one person exonerated for every ten who've been executed since 1976. Colorado has already executed an innocent person. Despite our best efforts, mistakes can and will happen. As long as we have the death penalty, the risk of executing an innocent person will always exist.

THE DEATH PENALTY IS EXPENSIVE

Colorado taxpayers pay \$3.5 million for a death penalty trial, about 23 times more than a non-capital trial. Since 1980, Coloradans have paid for over 130 capital prosecutions, at a cost of over \$1.5 million per year. Only one person has been executed. Countless law enforcement hours are spent chasing death sentences instead of addressing the 1,200 unsolved murder cases in Colorado. The limited resources spent on expensive death penalty trials would be better spent on programs that improve all of our lives, like crime prevention, victims' services, and mental health care.

THE DEATH PENALTY CAUSES MORE HARM

The death penalty can divide victims' families when they need each other the most, prolonging their pain by dragging them through an agonizing and lengthy process that promises an execution but rarely delivers. A study of victims' families found that those navigating cases without the death penalty exhibited better psychological and physical health.

THE DEATH PENALTY IS NOT A DETERRENT

The National Research Council reviewed more than three decades of research and found no credible evidence that the death penalty deters crime any more than long prison sentences. The murder rate in states with capital punishment is 25-46% higher than in states without the death penalty. In one survey, 88% of the country's top criminologists agreed that the death penalty is not a deterrent, while police chiefs rank the death penalty last among effective deterrents to violent crime.

THE DEATH PENALTY IS UNFAIRLY APPLIED

In Colorado, people of color are 5x more likely to face the death penalty, people in Arapahoe, Douglas or Lincoln counties are 4x more likely to face the death penalty, people of color in those counties are 14x more likely to face the death penalty and between 1999-2010, people of color faced 91% of death prosecutions. In cases where the victim is white, people are over 4x more likely to face the death penalty. Of the 539 defendants in Colorado who were eligible for the death penalty, only three received death sentences – all black men who went to the same high school.

The death penalty is not reserved for the "worst of the worst," just the most broken of the broken. Americans oppose executing the mentally ill by more than a 2-1 margin, yet 43% of inmates executed in the U.S. between 2000 and 2015 received a mental illness diagnosis, and 40% were abused during childhood. Additionally, around 90% of defendants who face the death penalty are unable to afford their own attorney.

THE DEATH PENALTY IS CRUEL AND UNUSUAL

When we carry out executions, we ask public servants to kill. Wardens and corrections staff frequently suffer from PTSD and other mental health issues as a result of their involvement in executions. Every major medical association in the U.S. considers participation in executions to be a breach of ethics for medical professionals. Reliance on untrained staff to carry out executions can lead to horribly botched executions and even more trauma for the public servants involved.

In the past five years, two dozen companies have blocked the use of 13 different drugs for lethal injections, including the only U.S.-manufactured drug that Colorado uses in executions. In response, states substitute untested drugs, pass secrecy laws barring anyone from knowing which drugs are used, and request drugs from compounding pharmacies, which have no oversight ensuring the efficacy of their products.

It is time to say in law what our state has made clear in practice. There has not been an execution since 1997, support for the death penalty is at its lowest level since 1972, and 158 countries and 24 states no longer execute their own people. We need to end this broken system.