

Repeal the Death Penalty

Support SB 6052

The death penalty has failed Washington. It is very costly, is not applied fairly, and fails either to provide swift and certain justice or to deter crime. Instead of trying to fix an unfixable system, the legislature should repeal the death penalty. The default sentence for first-degree aggravated murder is already life without the possibility of parole, and this would remain the case.

Seeking the Death Penalty Is Very Expensive

Because of the risk of executing an innocent person, the courts and state law rightly require extensive safeguards that are very costly. When a death sentence is sought, state and local governments must commit additional resources to case preparation, jury selection, trial, sentencing, and appeals. These requirements divert resources from the investigation and prosecution of other crimes, and from meeting the needs of survivors and victims' families.

A rigorous study by Seattle University criminologists found the average costs to the justice system related to pursuit of the death penalty were over \$1 million more per case than in similar cases when the death penalty was not sought. Three recent King County death penalty cases cost over \$15 million but failed to result in death sentences.

The Death Penalty Is Applied Unequally

Justice demands that a sentence as extreme as execution not be imposed inconsistently or arbitrarily. Yet the death penalty is applied unevenly in our state. A man who murdered one woman was put to death, while another man who was convicted of murdering 49 women was sentenced to life in prison. Many counties simply cannot afford to pursue the death penalty, so where a crime occurred unfairly influences whether or not the death penalty is sought. In fact, in recent years only King and Pierce Counties have had the resources to seek the death penalty.

The Death Penalty Fails to Provide Swift and Certain Justice

Victims' families and the public need justice to be swift and sure. The death penalty delivers neither. Capital cases take far longer than cases where the death penalty is not sought. As a result, victims' family members must endure an average of about 20 years of trials, appeals, and retrials. Death sentences are often overturned—since its reinstatement in 1981, nearly 80 percent of death sentences in Washington State have been reversed.

The Death Penalty Does Not Deter Crime

Scientific studies repeatedly have shown that capital punishment does not deter people from committing crimes, and national polling shows that a majority of law enforcement knows this to be true. People who commit murder either do so without thinking of the consequences or believe that they will not be caught. FBI statistics do not show correlation between having the death penalty and lower murder rates. Repealing the death penalty would allow Washington to redirect resources to proven crime-reduction strategies and to the needs of victims' families.

What Washington Media Are Saying About Repealing the Death Penalty

“Gov. Jay Inslee ... praised lawmakers for their ‘votes of courage and conviction.’ ‘I think it reflects an increasing recognition of the public that this is not an effective and certainly an unequal administration of justice and is no longer acceptable in the state of Washington,’ Inslee said.”

KPBX-FM (Spokane) and *KUOW-FM* (Seattle), “Washington Senate Votes to Repeal Death Penalty” (Feb. 14)

“A 2015 study from Seattle University found that death penalty cases in the state cost \$1 million more than similar cases where capital punishment is not sought.”

Associated Press in:

Columbia Basin Herald (Moses Lake)

KNDO (Tri-Cities)

KNDU (Yakima)

Skagit Valley Herald (Mt. Vernon)

Q-13 FOX News (Seattle)

“Washington Senate passes bill to abolish death penalty,” (Feb. 14)

“Efforts to eliminate Washington’s death penalty in the 2018 legislative session continued to break new ground Wednesday when a bill banning the practice passed the Senate.”

The News Tribune (Tacoma), “Abolition of death penalty gets closer to reality as bill clear Washington state Senate, (Feb. 14)

“The effort, long supported by Governor Inslee and State Attorney General Bob Ferguson, also got an extra push this year when Republican King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg testified in favor of ending the death penalty during a Senate Law and Justice Committee hearing. All three argue the death penalty is too costly, doesn’t offer closure for victim’s families, and is applied unequally.”

My Northwest.com (Seattle), “State Senate moves to repeal WA death penalty,” (Feb. 14)