



870 Market St., Suite 850, San Francisco, CA 94102 ♦ Tel: 415.262.0082 ♦ Fax: 415.243.0994  
www.californiacrimevictims.org

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## California Crime Victims Oppose the Death Penalty Because:

**The death penalty wastes money:** The costs of confinement on death row, the mandatory capital appeals process, and the infrastructure necessary to support the state's death chambers make the death penalty far more expensive to administer than permanent imprisonment. Even when using conservative estimates, the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice\* concluded that *California would save \$125 million per year* if we used the alternative of permanent imprisonment rather than capital punishment.

**The death penalty does not serve murder victim family members:** Proponents of the death penalty often call for it in the name of victims. In actuality, the death penalty takes away valuable public safety resources that could be better spent on victim's needs. Money spent on California's death penalty is diverted from violence prevention programs and victim's services, like grief counseling. Furthermore, funding for state crime labs, DNA testing, and local law enforcement is scarce, contributing to thousands of killers getting away with murder. According to a report released by CCV\*\*, *1,000 murders go unsolved each year* in California due to lack of resources for criminal investigations while we spend hundreds of millions of dollars pursuing death sentences for a small percentage of killers. We need justice for all victims, not just symbolism for a few.

**The death penalty prolongs the victims' pain:** The lengthy death penalty process is a traumatizing experience for families, often requiring them to relive the pain and suffering of the death of their loved one for many years. Prisoners sentenced to permanent imprisonment don't have the same ability as death row inmates to appeal their case, so the final judgment in non-capital cases occurs much sooner offering victims the opportunity to begin the healing process much sooner. Furthermore, in death penalty cases, attention is directed on the crime and the accused instead of where it belongs — on the family and loved ones of the victim and on the community. Permanent imprisonment punishes the criminal without putting him or her in the headlines.

**The death penalty does not deter crime:** A recent FBI Uniform Crime Report showed that the South – which accounts for over 80% of executions – had the highest murder rate. The Northeast, which carries out less than 1% of all executions, had the lowest murder rate. The most recent review of research findings on the relation between the death penalty and homicide rates, conducted for the United Nations, concluded: "it is not prudent to accept the hypothesis that capital punishment deters murder to a marginally greater extent than does the threat and application of the supposedly lesser punishment of life imprisonment."

A better deterrent would be solving cold cases and getting thousands of killers off of our streets. Those who get away with murder learn that they can.

**The risk of executing an innocent person is too great:** Since 1976, 135 men and women have been released from death rows all over the country after being found innocent, several of whom came within hours of execution. Almost none of these errors were found through the regular appeals process, but through the efforts of independent activists. There is mounting evidence to suggest that several innocent men were wrongfully executed in the United States in the last 20 years. Ultimately, it does victims no good to convict the innocent. The execution of an innocent person creates even more victims and is a risk we are not willing to take.

**The death penalty creates a group of second class of victims:** The families of the executed are innocent victims who are often forgotten in the death penalty discussion. The mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters of the condemned undergo a trauma that is uniquely painful and poignant. They become hidden victims, stigmatized within their communities, marginalized by the media, and bypassed by the authorities in the years before and after an execution. But they are family members who have lost a loved one, just like we have.

**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. For example, someone convicted of murder in Alameda County is nearly eight times more likely to be sentenced to death than someone convicted of the same crime in neighboring Santa Clara County. This unpredictable application of the death penalty leads to the differing treatment of victims that we find unacceptable. Furthermore, a disproportionate number of people on death rows are people of color. Reliable studies show that the *race of the victim plays the most statistically significant role in who gets the death penalty*. Consistent sentencing with permanent imprisonment, as one option, for the most heinous offenders is far more just and equitable.

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\* The California State Senate created the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice ([www.ccfaj.org](http://www.ccfaj.org)) in order to study and review the administration of criminal justice in California to determine the extent to which that process has failed in the past resulting in wrongful executions or the wrongful conviction of innocent persons, to examine ways of providing safeguards and making improvements in the way the criminal justice system functions, and to make any recommendations and proposals designed to further ensure that the application and administration of criminal justice in California is just, fair, and accurate.

The Commission released its “Report and Recommendation on the Administration of the Death Penalty in California” on June 30, 2008 based on testimony from three public hearings that took place in January, February, and March 2008.

\*\* CCV released “The Silent Crisis in California: Unsolved Murders” on April 7, 2010 (<http://www.californiacrimevictims.org/Publications/The%20Silent%20Crisis%20in%20California.pdf>)

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California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (CCV) is a coalition of families, friends, and loved ones of murder victims who oppose the death penalty. The coalition supports families, friends, and loved ones in telling their stories and being heard. CCV educates the public about alternatives to the death penalty and provides information regarding resources and support to families regardless of their views on the death penalty or whether the perpetrator has been apprehended.

CCV can provide powerful, thought-provoking speakers for your school, church, or organization. If you would like to schedule a speaker or if you would like to receive more information about CCV, please contact:

**Aarti Kelapure**  
**CCV Program Coordinator**  
**870 Market St., Suite 859**  
**San Francisco, CA 94102**  
**415.262.0082**  
[aarti@deathpenalty.org](mailto:aarti@deathpenalty.org)

**Or sign up to receive emails on our website: [www.californiacrimevictims.org](http://www.californiacrimevictims.org)**