

CCV Year-End News 2012

December 2012

california
Crime Victims
for Alternatives
to the Death Penalty

Prop 34 loses by narrow margin, represents significant change in death penalty opinion

California's biggest effort to end the death penalty was narrowly defeated at the ballot box, 48%-52%. It was an extremely close race, with less than 500,000 votes (out of 12 million) separating the two sides.

800,000 qualifying the initiative for the November ballot under the new name, Proposition 34.

Proposition 34 earned the endorsements of 55 newspapers, including the Sacramento Bee who,

prior to this election, had supported the death penalty for over 100 years. Prop 34 also earned over 13,000 individual endorsements, and nearly 450 endorsements of survivors of murder victims. It brought together former prosecutors, former presidents, mayors, wrongfully convicted people,

former wardens, victims of violent crime, people of faith, labor leaders, community organizers, and more. It was an historic coalition, and one that got attention across the country due to its unique makeup.

Prop 34 also benefited from the support of over 7,000 dedicated volunteers. Volunteers staffed phone banks, reaching over 110,000 voters in Los Angeles County, and held community events to provide information on the death penalty. The

Inside this issue:

Prop 34 narrowly defeated at ballot box 1

The survivor of a violent attack speaks out against the death penalty 2

Reflections from the campaign: lessons learned, relationships forged 3

Looking forward to 2013 4

The narrow margin shows that attitudes are changing significantly around the death penalty. Once thought to have over 80% support in California, the death penalty clung on by just 4%.

We now know for a fact that Californians, when given real facts about the costs of the death penalty, are ready to replace it with life in prison without possibility of parole.

The campaign was one of the most ambitious efforts in the nation to end the death penalty. In August of 2011, volunteers hit the streets to gather hundreds of thousands of signatures in order for the death penalty to be on the ballot. In order to qualify for the ballot, the campaign needed 504,000 signatures. The campaign gathered over



CCV members celebrate the hard work put in during the Proposition 34 campaign at an election night party

Cont. on page 3



A Story of Survival: How a brutal attack by a serial killer cemented my opposition to the death penalty

By J. Rose Steward



J. Rose Steward, Allen J. Schaben/*Los Angeles Times*

Like most 21 year-olds, the death penalty wasn't something I had put a lot of thought into. I was vaguely aware, like most people, that it was applied disproportionately to minorities and the poor. But I was just moving into my first apartment, my whole life was ahead of me, and it was a time filled with opportunity and expectation.

And then something happened that compelled me to take the issue seriously.

It was 1984, and I had just celebrated my 22nd birthday. Days earlier, my neighbor had kicked out a particularly annoying house guest who kept coming over to my apartment uninvited and hanging around. I complained to his host, who asked him to leave.

On the night of March 29, I went to bed around midnight and fell into a deep sleep. At 1:28 am I awoke to a man standing over me with a knife, and my life as I knew it ceased to exist. The man who attacked me that night, the one that my neighbor asked to leave, who sexually assaulted me, dragged me around the apartment by my neck for 5 hours, playing cat and mouse with his terrified captive, turned out to be a serial killer. In the two weeks following my escape he killed 5 young women, leaving a trail of bodies that stretched from San Francisco to San Diego.

I was lucky in that my attacker was apprehended. However, it took eight long years to wrap up the three trials that followed. My assailant was sentenced to death for the murders and now sits on San Quentin's Death Row. For me, he received 56 years. When the defense argued that the sentence was too stiff given that I survived, the judge countered, in a moment of profound empathy, that on the contrary, in his view I had died not once but several times, and the only difference was that I was going to have to find a way to live with that.

And I can tell you, living with that, even 27 years later, is hard. I was strangled that night, twice. Confronting the capacity of a fellow human being to inflict such cruelty on another changed me forever. The sensation of re-living the experience every time I hear a similar story on the news compels me to ask one simple question: What can we do to make this stop?

My search for answers has repeatedly led me away from the death penalty. If I believed in my heart it could save the life of just one person, I would support it. But it does not. The vast

majority of violent offenders are products of abuse, neglect, drug use, poverty, or, mental illness, and my attacker was no exception. A psyche thus damaged does not respond to the threat of tougher sentencing. Over the last 20 years, states that have replaced the death penalty consistently show lower rates of murder than those who still have it on the books. Even some of its most vocal supporters have admitted that it does not act as a deterrent.

The cost of providing for these killers for the rest of their lives in another reason cited in support of capital punishment. In fact the process of prosecuting a death penalty case is far more expensive than the sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole. Independent estimates project that replacing it will save California \$130 million each year, money that can be re-directed toward getting more killers off the streets.

But there are other important considerations, those of justice.

My heart goes out to those on the other side of this issue, who have suffered as a result of violent crime. I have met with, and wept with, such people, and I mean no disrespect in my disagreement with them. I have also met many crime victims who, like me, oppose the death penalty. The process is so costly, so cumbersome, that rather than provide a timely end to a painful chapter, it draws it out for years, even decades, so that those involved are denied the opportunity to pick up the pieces of their lives and begin healing. We could eliminate the many protections in place, but then we will soon be executing people of questionable guilt or mental competence as they have so famously done in Texas, and this is inexcusable.

One thing I am certain of is that the prospect of getting that call telling me that my attacker's execution is imminent has had me feeling torn, and at some level holding my breath, for nearly three decades now. I dread that day. There is no justice in that.

My primary focus is on what we can do to make this all stop, and the death penalty does not survive that test. How can we say with credibility that murder is abhorrent, an abomination, and then turn around and commit the act ourselves? It's understandable that we want to, but the question is, should we. Does the death penalty work, or does it ultimately compromise all of us by bringing us down to the level of the very people we wish to protect ourselves from? For me, it isn't sympathy, it isn't coddling, to resist with every fiber of my being the desire, no matter how justified, to resemble in any way the man who took from me the life I might have had.

Ending the death penalty will draw a bold and clear line between who we are and what we stand for versus the killers in our midst. It will eliminate the unacceptable possibility of our killing an innocent, save the state desperately needed funds that can be used to focus on catching criminals, and provide for public safety by consigning killers to life without the possibility of parole.

This is why it's personal: A reflection on Proposition 34 and the continuing effort to show why victims oppose the death penalty

By Deldelp Medina

Life changes in a split of a second.

Eight years ago, I lived an ordinary life, filled with my own woes and tribulations. Yet it was steady and surrounded by great friends and family. I come from a family of policy and politics nerds. We discuss issues the way some people talk about sports, with passion and interest. We keep track of the latest changes, bills and races. The death penalty was always something we opposed in theory. Then my aunt was murdered by her own son while in midst of a schizophrenic break. He was charged with the death penalty and abstraction went out the window.

When Natasha Minsker asked me to work on Prop 34 I was flattered and surprised. I had never worked on a political campaign that was this personal. It required me to share my family's story with hundreds if not thousands of people. It required me to be vulnerable about one of the most painful chapters in my life. It was not easy, but it was rewarding. I was touched every time someone came up to me to say, "You changed my mind."

In the process I met some of you and got to know your stories. I learned more about human resiliency, kindness, and intelligence through my fellow victim family members. Each one of you showed me that family, community and support can come from the unlikeliest of places. We have a unique bond. I want to thank all of you for sharing your stories, and being an agent for change. You have helped change the faces of murder victim family members. The public now knows who we are: Lorrain Taylor, Judy Kerr, Mattie Scott, Aqeela Sherrills, Ronnie Sand-

oval, Bethany Webb, Aundre Herron, Brent Tonick and *many* more of you.

I also met exonorees like Juan Melendez, Obie Anthony and Franky Carrillo. I got to hear a very different perspective about how our system is so deeply broken. I saw in their eyes their commitment to safer communities. How they realize that their experience mirrors those of survivors of murder victims. Spending years in prison for a crime you did not commit is not easy, and yet they all are dedicated to joining us in changing our system.



Deldelp Medina speaks about the effects of the death penalty on the Latino community.

Right now I will admit that I am sad and disappointed. I think we all are. Many of us worked and volunteered many hours, donated money, and exposed our most painful moments. Yet we all know too well how to soldier on. And that is just what we will do.

Proposition 34 was created keeping our experiences in mind. It was to help our fellow Californians know that too often our communities are not safe; that the death penalty and its costs are too often at our expense. With a 46% unsolved murder rate, we need to do better.

But you know this already, many of you live with it. So now what? It is time for us to have a moment of reflection. To see what we did, what we could have done better and what we will improve. Our work will continue because we, of course, are not giving up. If you have a suggestion, let us know.

We will need your voice, support, and dedication to continue our work in educating Californians about what the death penalty does for victims: Nothing. My work is not over, and my commitment to you and your families is just as strong.

Cont from page 1

support of volunteers across the state helped close the gap significantly.

Though the result was not what was hoped for, Proposition 34 forever changed the discussion of the death penalty. For the first time, a majority of people understood that the death penalty costs more than life in prison, and people finally heard the

stories of why the death penalty does not provide justice. We also know where we need to improve upon that knowledge. Armed with the data obtained through Proposition 34, we will be able to move forward in an even more strategic way, focusing efforts in locations where we need to increase support. The death penalty's days are numbered in California, thanks to the work of all Prop 34 volunteers, staff, and supporters.



**CALIFORNIA CRIME VICTIMS FOR
ALTERNATIVES TO THE DEATH PENALTY**

5 Third Street
Suite 725
San Francisco, CA 94103

Phone: 415.262.0082
Fax: 415.766.4593
Email: chelsea@deathpenalty.org

california
Crime Victims
for **Alternatives**
to the Death Penalty

www.CaliforniaCrimeVictims.org
www.facebook.com/californiacrimevictims
www.twitter.com/CalCrimeVictims

**Want to receive CCV updates by e-mail? Visit
www.californiacrimevictims.org to sign up!**

California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (CCV) is a coalition of murder victim family members who support alternatives to the death penalty. After the horrifying loss of a loved one to homicide, they are left with a clear awareness that the death penalty fails to address the needs of victims on many counts. The coalition does not endorse any specific reason for opposing the death penalty, but supports all families in telling their stories and educates the public about alternatives to the death penalty. CCV can also direct families to available support and resources regardless of their views on the death penalty or whether the perpetrator has been apprehended.

CCV Staff:

Chelsea Bond, Program Coordinator
chelsea@deathpenalty.org

Deldelp Medina, Northern California Victim Outreach Coordinator
deldelp@deathpenalty.org

Aqeela Sherrills, Southern California Victim Outreach Coordinator
aqeela@deathpenalty.org

CCV celebrates victories, prepares for next steps

As 2012 draws to a close, CCV has been reflecting on the work done, the progress made, and the steps still to come. Due to Prop 34 on the California ballot, CCV was able to expand our voice even more. The stories of our CCV supporters were featured in newspaper articles, television stories, radio interviews, and in churches, schools, and community events across the state. The impact of this coverage was felt, more people were able to understand that the death penalty is not the answer for many victims and families of violent crime.

CCV was also able to grow the number of our survivors significantly. To all who joined this past year—thank you for being a part of this coalition. Our growing numbers of families who oppose the death penalty will only help us in our future efforts to end the death penalty in California. As our numbers approach 800 murder victim family members, we will be able to have an even larger impact.

I would like to thank Deldelp Medina and Aqeela Sherrills, our Victim Outreach Coordinators, for their dedication throughout the year. They were instrumental in raising support in communities of color and forging new alliances for CCV.

I also would like to thank all of you who gave your time to write letters, op-eds, meet with legislators, speak at community

events, phone bank, or contribute in any way to the effort to end the death penalty. Your courage, bravery, and passion has been inspirational.

Many people have asked me what the next step is. Currently, CCV is working with our coalition partners to develop a plan for the next few years. We will be analyzing results from Prop 34 to create a strategy that will figure out the regions and demographics where we need to increase our support. We now know that winning is possible, that Californians are almost ready to move away from having a death penalty. We will work on local efforts to convince DA's to stop pursuing the death penalty. CCV also intends to bring up larger issues that matter to victims—access to compensation and fair treatment.

2013 will bring many changes, but our work to fight for the needs of victims will continue. I look forward to working with you all, and thank you for helping make 2012 such a memorable and historic year.

Happy Holidays,



Chelsea Bond, Program Coordinator