

Why Are Tennessee Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty?

A growing number of conservatives are expressing concerns about the death penalty and its effectiveness, cost, and accuracy. Fifty years of experience has taught us that no matter how hard the government tries to get this system right, it fails at every turn, from convicting innocent people to botching execution procedures, all while spending millions of taxpayer dollars in the process.

Tennessee's death penalty is not pro-life:

- Tennessee's death penalty denies the possibility of atonement and redemption for those who have caused harm.
- The death penalty gets it wrong. Since 1972, at least 190 people in the U.S. were wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death, then later exonerated and freed. That is one person exonerated for every 8.2 people who were executed.
- Tennessee has had three death row exonerations since 1972 while others, like Pervis Payne, are working to prove their innocence.

Tennessee's death penalty is not truth in sentencing, harming victims' families:

- Tennessee's death penalty makes false promises to victims' families as fewer than 1 in 20 death sentences over the last 50 years have resulted in an execution.
- Surviving families of murder victims spend decades in a legal process that keeps them trapped in their trauma. Alternative sentences would provide legal finality much sooner, sometimes as soon as the trial is over.

Tennessee's death penalty costs millions:

- Studies show the death penalty costs approximately \$2 million more over the course of a case than life without parole.
- Four Tennessee counties—Shelby, Davidson, Knox, and Hamilton—account for 70% of Tennessee's death row. Tennessee's rural counties pay for the death penalty used mostly by urban counties.
- From 2017-2020, the Memphis Police had a homicide clearance rate of 32%; Nashville, 43%; Knoxville, 37%; and Chattanooga, 39%. Taxpayer dollars should be used to solve more cases instead of pursuing the death penalty for those already incarcerated.

Tennessee's death penalty does not make us safer:

- A report by the National Research Council, titled "Deterrence and the Death Penalty," states that studies claiming that the death penalty has a deterrent effect on murder rates are "fundamentally flawed" and should not be used when making policy decisions.
- A Death Penalty Information Center study of 30 years of FBI Uniform Crime Report homicide data found that the South has had by far the highest murder rate. The South accounts for more than 80% of executions. The Northeast, which has fewer than 0.5% of all executions, has consistently had the lowest murder rate.

The public is moving away from the death penalty:

- Over the last five years, four states have ended the death penalty, bringing the total number of states without it to 23, plus the District of Columbia. Fourteen states have not carried out an execution in 10 or more years, meaning three-quarters of all states are not using the death penalty.
- In 2022, national polling found that support for capital punishment in the U.S. remains near half-century lows.
- A 2022 poll released by Vanderbilt University found that 53% of Tennesseans say life imprisonment is the preferable option for those convicted of murder while 37% think the death penalty is the better of the two choices.

Tennessee needs real solutions:

If Tennesseans truly want to embrace a culture of life and to find effective responses to crime, we should be focused on crime prevention, investing in solutions that focus on accountability and early intervention to prevent crime. We should be solving more violent crime, and we should get victims of violence and surviving families of murder victims the resources that they need so that their healing isn't reliant on what happens to the people who've caused them harm.

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