

# Wasteful and Inefficient

## The alarming cost of the death penalty

Many people believe that the death penalty is more cost-effective than housing and feeding a prisoner for life. In actuality, the death penalty's complexity, length, and finality make it much more expensive than life without parole. **Capital punishment is a bloated government program that has bogged down law enforcement, delayed justice for victims' families, and devoured millions of crime-fighting dollars which could otherwise save lives and protect the public.**

### How much *does* the death penalty cost?

- ◆ The most rigorous cost study in the country found that *a single death sentence in Maryland costs almost \$2 million more* than a comparable non-death penalty case. Maryland spent \$186 million *extra* to carry out just five executions.
- ◆ More than a dozen states have found that the death penalty is up to 10 times more expensive than sentences of life or life without parole.
- ◆ The death penalty's high costs add up to more than just dollars. In the time it takes to pursue one capital case, law enforcement could solve and prosecute scores of non-capital cases. Instead, many crimes go unsolved or unprosecuted, and those responsible are free to commit more serious crimes.

### Why does it cost so much?

- ◆ The death penalty process is more complicated because a life is on the line. Capital cases involve more lawyers, more witnesses, more experts, a longer jury selection process, more pre-trial motions, an entirely separate trial for sentencing, and countless other expenses – racking up exorbitant costs even before a single appeal is filed.
- ◆ The majority of the death penalty's costs never appear as line items in any budget. They are buried in a thicket of legal proceedings and hours spent by judges, clerks, prosecutors, and other law enforcement agencies – time that could be spent investigating, prosecuting, sentencing, and *preventing* other crimes.
- ◆ Most death penalty trials are found to be significantly flawed and must be re-done, sometimes more than once, adding to the high cost.
- ◆ In most cases where the death penalty is sought, it is never imposed. And even when it is imposed, it is rarely carried out. Yet taxpayers are saddled with the death penalty's extra costs *even in cases where the defendant is not sentenced to death.*



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## **Who pays for the death penalty?**

- ◆ One key study found that the costs of the death penalty are borne primarily by increasing taxes and cutting services like police and highway funding, with county budgets bearing the brunt of the burden.
- ◆ The burden is even higher on smaller counties. Jasper County, Texas, raised property taxes by nearly 7% just to pay for a single death penalty case. Two capital cases forced Jefferson County, Florida, to freeze employee raises and slash the library budget.
- ◆ The death penalty diverts resources which could be used to help homicide survivors heal — including grief and trauma counseling, scholarships for orphaned children, professional leave to attend court proceedings, and financial support.
- ◆ Law enforcement officers recognize that the death penalty is a poor crime prevention tool. Surveys show that they would prefer funds be spent by adding police or reducing drug abuse.

## **Can we make the system cheaper?**

- ◆ Many of the extra costs are legally mandated to reduce the risk of executing an innocent person. And even these safeguards are not enough. At least 139 people have been exonerated from death row after waiting years for the truth to come out. Streamlining the process would virtually guarantee the execution of an innocent person.
- ◆ Even states with the fewest protections and a faster process face exorbitant death penalty costs. In Texas, for example, the death penalty still costs an average of three times more than 40 years in prison at maximum security.

**We've learned a lot about the death penalty in the last 30 years. It is a bloated and expensive system that has bogged down law enforcement, delayed justice for victims' families, and squandered millions of crime-fighting dollars. Can we afford the price?**

“I think I could prove to you that I could put someone in the Waldorf Hotel for 60 to 70 years and feed them three meals a day cheaper than we can litigate a single death penalty case.”  
*Sterling Goodspeed, former District Attorney, Warren County, NY*

