

Repeal the Death Penalty

Support HB 1935 & 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.