



Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

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DEATH PENALTY DECLINES BY EVERY MEASURE ACROSS U.S.

(York PA) By every measure – public opinion, death sentences, and executions – the death penalty declined in 2015. Pennsylvania was among the 44 states that did not conduct any executions, reflecting the increasing geographic isolation of the death penalty. Only six states carried out executions this year, and the 28 total executions in the U.S. marked the lowest number since 1991. Governor Wolf joined three other governors in imposing a gubernatorial moratorium on executions.

In 2015, six people were exonerated from death row across the country, highlighting the ongoing risk of wrongful convictions in capital cases; six is also the number of men that have been exonerated from death row in Pennsylvania in the modern era of the death penalty. This includes Nick Yarris who, after spending 21 years on PA's death row, was exonerated based on DNA evidence. During that same period, from 1976 to the present, only three people were executed, all of whom were volunteers who gave up their rights to appeal.

“In the 35-year history of Pennsylvania’s death penalty, when 400 people have been sentenced to death and more than 250 of those sentences have been reversed, when the single most likely outcome of a public policy is that it is overturned, that should give you pause” said Kathleen Lucas, Executive Director of Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. “The national trends clearly show that the death penalty is falling out of favor as the public becomes more aware of this broken system. It is time for Pennsylvania to reconsider this costly and error-prone punishment.”

A 2015 Pennsylvania public opinion poll showed that more than half of those questioned support a moratorium on executions. Senator Daylin Leach has re-introduced a bill that would end the use of the death penalty in the Commonwealth.

“If the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is going to take the irrevocable step of executing a human being, its capital sentencing system must be infallible. Pennsylvania’s system is riddled with flaws, making it error prone, expensive, and anything but infallible.”

—Governor Tom Wolf, announcing moratorium on executions in Pennsylvania

To speak about the state of the death penalty in Pennsylvania, contact Kathleen Lucas at KLucas@padp.org or 717-236-4840

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