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Montana Abolition Coalition

I represent many Montanans who oppose the use of capital punishment in our state and our nation. We maintain that the death penalty should be abolished in our prison system and be replaced with a life sentence without parole, which is available in the state of Montana.

Though only two executions have taken place in our state since 1976, there are currently four inmates on death row in Montana. Support for capital punishment has steadily been lessening as arguments supporting the method are proven wrong. People in favor of the death penalty have claimed that it is cheaper than imprisonment, it discourages crime, and it provides closure to the victim or the victims' family. However, facts contradict these beliefs.

When it comes to money, it has been estimated that death penalty proceedings, which are drawn out and expensive, cost 38% more than a life without parole sentence. In addition, the average time on death row is 12 years. The inmates must be imprisoned during this time period, and when that cost is added to the price of the trials and lawyers, the total far surpasses that of life without parole. The Montana Abolition Coalition advocates that money currently spent on the death penalty should be spent on crime prevention programs and victims' assistance programs.

The argument that capital punishment serves as a deterrent for crime does not hold true. Research shows that executions have no effect on capital crimes. Also, over 124 people have been found innocent after they were sentenced to death. The Innocence Project in Montana works toward finding wrongly convicted people and helping exonerate them. Three Montanans, while not sentenced to death, have been mistakenly convicted of rape and sentenced to 30 or 40 years in prison. Each served 8-15 years before being proven innocent with more advanced scientific testing. There are too many errors in the process, including unreliable witnesses and incompetent lawyers, to decide whether a person lives or dies.

Not many victims of criminals sentenced to death row are in favor of the death penalty. In fact, there are at least three national organizations opposing capital punishment that are run by families of murder victims. Why would someone defend the life of a person who took the life of a loved one? Amanda Wilcox, the mother of a murder victim, states it best: "The death penalty is frequently justified in the name of the victims; it is said that it is needed for them to find 'closure.' The lengthy process of trials, appeals, and anticipated execution would only impede coming to terms with a horrible loss. If closure means healing, that healing must come from within, not from the fate of the murderer." If one-time sentences of life without parole were used for these types of cases, the families could move on much sooner.

The Montana Abolition Coalition believes that the death penalty has no positive effect. It serves no purpose in society and should not be continued anywhere. By eliminating capital punishment first in Montana, we can then attempt to bring an end to the method in the United States.

I will support all legislation that abolishes the use of the death penalty or helps inform Montanans of the consequences of capital punishment.

Brooke A. Reid

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