

## Fact Sheet: The Economics of Capital Punishment

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### THE CONTROVERSY:

- It is nearly impossible to place an exact price on a death penalty system, as is the case for life imprisonment. Death penalty systems that execute quickly, inevitably cost less than other systems that allow more careful post-conviction procedures to take place.
- Many studies that have found the death penalty to be MORE expensive only take into account one case, or a few cases and compare them to similar life imprisonment cases. These studies do not take into account the numerous cases that begin with a death sentence and end with a commuted sentence, with all of the trial and appeals costs of a death penalty case, as well as all of the prison costs of a life case.
- When analyzing the death penalty's costs, one must look at the system as a whole, and decide whether it is more expensive to have a system where the death penalty is an option the prosecution may choose.
- The overwhelming majority of studies taken in the past decade that deal with the death penalty system as it exists in various states within the US have found that it inevitably costs more than a system where life without parole is the harshest punishment available.
- In addition, death penalty cases accrue costs upfront, at lengthy trials and appeals while life imprisonment cases are costly over a range of an inmates life (the average is approximately 40 years). The upfront costs bear more on the state and local governments than do the long-term costs. Even if the two systems costs exactly the same amount, the burden that the states will take over a few months is much heavier than an equivalent burden spread out over half a century.

### CAPITAL PUNISHMENT COSTS MORE THAN LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE:

- Various state governments estimate that a single death penalty case, from the point of arrest to execution, ranges from \$1 million to \$3 million per case.
- Other studies have estimated the cost to be as high as \$7 million.
- Cases resulting in life imprisonment average around \$500,000 each, including incarceration cost.
- 82% of cases where the prosecution sets out seeking the death sentence are converted to life without parole, meaning that they accrue death penalty-like trial costs with all the costs of a life sentence in the end.
- In Texas, where the death penalty system is "most efficient" in that the highest percentage of cases that seek the death penalty actually end with execution, the state still estimates an additional cost of \$2.3 million averaged out per case for the death penalty (as opposed to life).
- In North Carolina, a study showed that the average cost per case for a system with a maximum penalty of death was \$2.16 million.
- In a study conducted by Duke University, it was found that even if the death penalty system ended in execution for 100% of the defendants it sought to execute from the beginning, the extra costs would still amount to approximately \$216,000 per case over a system where the maximum sentence was life without parole.

**The millions of dollars spent on capital punishment cuts into resources for other community interests, such as schools, hospitals, public safety, and jobs.**