

## Smart on Crime?

# How The Death Penalty Fails to Keep Us Safe

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Law enforcement officials have criticized capital punishment for wasting scarce crime prevention resources. The time spent chasing a handful of executions means countless other crimes go unsolved and the criminals who committed them remain free. Because the death penalty does not deter irrational acts of violence, and drains away both time and money from the criminal justice system, many law enforcement officials find it a distraction from their goal of public safety.

### The death penalty diverts scarce resources away from crime prevention

In study after study over the past decade, the non-partisan Indiana Legislative Services Agency has found that the death penalty costs much more than life without parole. Many law enforcement officers and prosecutors around the country believe that's not money well spent.

- “Throughout Illinois, law enforcement officials are struggling to find needed dollars for police, forensic investigations, and aggressive prosecution of a wide range of criminal activity. The vast sums that would be spent on the death penalty in the years ahead are sorely needed for other, more effective law enforcement purposes.”
  - *More than 60 former judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers who wrote to Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn as he weighed whether to sign a death penalty repeal bill passed by the Illinois General Assembly in January, 2011*
- “Continuing to spend millions of dollars to take a murder defendant who has already been caught and subject him to death rather than life without parole will not prevent the next murder. Redirecting money to more vigorously apprehend and prosecute armed robbers, rapists, burglars, and those who commit gun crimes will prevent murders and save lives.”
  - *Robert M. Carney, District Attorney, Schenectady, NY*
- “The state can protect many more officers at a fraction of the cost by adding police, providing the best protective equipment available, and implementing effective policing programs known to reduce crime. The death penalty is simply a distraction from the real issues surrounding public safety.”
  - *Patrick Murphy, Former Detroit and New York City Police Commissioner*

### The death penalty does not reduce crime

- No credible study has found that the death penalty deters crime. This isn't surprising. To the extent that someone with a deadly weapon is likely to be deterred from using it, the

prospect of a severe, swift and certain punishment like life without the possibility of parole is more persuasive than the remote prospect of being executed in 15 to 20 years.

- A simple comparison reveals that states with the most executions have the highest murder rates, while those with the fewest executions have the lowest murder rates. Even though the South accounts for more than 80% of executions in America since 1976, its murder rate is higher than any other region in the U.S. The South also had the highest number of law enforcement officers killed in the last ten years.
- Death sentences and executions have been steadily going down over the past ten years, both nationwide and here in Indiana, and the murder rate has not gone up. In fact, Indiana's murder rate from 2001 through 2010 dropped from 6.8 to 4.5 per 100,000 people.
- Police officers, on the front lines in the fight against violent crime, do not believe that the death penalty deters murder or reduces crime. A 2009 survey of police chiefs found that they ranked the death penalty *last* among effective ways to reduce violent crime. A full 99% said that other changes, such as better policing resources and treatment for the mentally ill, were more important than expanding the death penalty in reducing violent crime.

**"Prosecutors must reveal the dirty little secret they too often share only among themselves: The death penalty actually hinders the fight against crime."**

*-- Robert M. Morgenthau,  
former Manhattan District  
Attorney*

Let's stop throwing away millions of dollars on the death penalty. Instead, let's give our police and prosecutors the tools they need to fight crime more effectively. Like more officers with better training and better protective gear, and improved and expanded forensic science labs. Our safety matters, Indiana, so let's start being smart on crime.



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