

# Pennsylvania's death penalty

## Did you know?

**There are serious concerns about discrimination and inaccuracy in Pennsylvania's death penalty. We need a moratorium on executions in Pennsylvania while issues of discrimination can be adequately studied and the resulting recommendations fully addressed. Now is the time for the legislature to do a full assessment and tackle this problem head on. Consider the facts:**

### **Innocent lives in the balance**

- ◆ Since 1973, at least 123 death row inmates have been released after evidence proved their innocence.
- ◆ Six men have been wrongfully convicted and released from Pennsylvania's death row, twice as many people as the state has executed.
- ◆ In 2004, Nick Yarris was released after spending 21 years on death row. Nick was the victim of a jailhouse snitch, prosecutorial misconduct, and botched DNA testing before he was finally released.

### **The right to a decent lawyer?**

- ◆ More than 90 percent of Pennsylvania's death row prisoners were too poor to afford a lawyer for their initial trial.
- ◆ A report by the Pennsylvania State Supreme Court released emphasized that the state is failing to provide adequate counsel to poor people facing death.

### **Racially skewed**

- ◆ Almost 70 percent of the people on Pennsylvania's death row are people of color. Pennsylvania has the largest percentage of minorities on death row among states with more than 10 people on the row. (Pennsylvania's death row has over 200 prisoners.)
- ◆ Independent researchers found that, even after controlling for case differences, blacks in Philadelphia were 3.9 times more likely to get the death penalty than other defendants who committed similar murders.

### **A lottery of geography**

*Where* a crime happens can be as important as what type of crime is committed in determining who lives and who dies.

- ◆ Of those sentenced to death in Pennsylvania, more than half come from Philadelphia County, which accounts for only 14 percent of the state's population.
- ◆ Although Philadelphia's murder rate is only about 3 times greater than that of Harrisburg, the proportion of those condemned to death is 11 times greater in Philadelphia.

### **Pennsylvanians want a justice system that is fair**

- ◆ Polling has shown that 72% of Pennsylvanians favor suspending the death penalty until questions of fairness can be studied.
- ◆ More than two thirds of Pennsylvanians agree that the death penalty is unevenly applied to the poor, and more than half agree that it is unevenly applied to African Americans.
- ◆ A recent poll found that most Pennsylvanians prefer a life sentence over the death penalty.
- ◆ Former Republican Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum said recently, "I felt very troubled about cases where someone may have been convicted wrongly. I would certainly suggest there probably should be some further limits on what we use it for."
- ◆ Almost 200 organizations throughout Pennsylvania have called for a moratorium on executions, including professional associations, small businesses, churches, and city councils.

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