



P E N N S Y L V A N I A M O R A T O R I U M C O A L I T I O N

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Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition Mission Statement and Member Statements of Participation

Mission Statement:

The Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition supports a suspension of executions in Pennsylvania while all aspects of the death penalty as currently administered in Pennsylvania are reviewed and any resulting recommendations fully addressed. The Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition is composed of diverse organizations from all across the state of Pennsylvania. Regardless of their philosophical position on the death penalty, the organizations that make up the Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition agree that the current practice of capital punishment in Pennsylvania needs to be reviewed because it is discriminatory and does not guarantee against the possibility of a wrongful execution.

Participation Statements:

Amnesty International USA supports the Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition and its goal to bring about a suspension of the death penalty in Pennsylvania. Amnesty is eager to join with other statewide civic and religious organizations in delivering to Governor Rendell, the Pennsylvania State Legislature and the people of Pennsylvania the message that the state's system of capital punishment needs to be suspended and reviewed. Amnesty International fully supports the Coalition's conclusion that the death penalty as administered in Pennsylvania is "discriminatory and does not guarantee against the possibility of a wrongful execution." Amnesty International USA, as a member of the Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition, continues to oppose the death penalty in all circumstances as the ultimate denial of human rights.

American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania

American Friends Service Committee

Amnesty International USA

Evangelicals for Social Action

The Interfaith Alliance of Pennsylvania

Jewish Social Policy Action Network

League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania

Murder Victims' Family Members for Human Rights

Pennsylvania Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Pennsylvania Catholic Conference

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

Pennsylvania Prison Society

Witness to Innocence

The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania: As a staunch defender of constitutional rights and American ideals, the ACLU of Pennsylvania believes strongly in transparent and accountable government. With this in mind, legislation that creates a study commission on the death penalty with a two-year suspension of executions provides the Commonwealth with an opportunity to learn more about how capital punishment functions and malfunctions. The ACLU of PA believes there is great benefit to learning more about this government program. We are deeply concerned about the impact of class and race on death sentencing and the possibility that these factors lead to the conviction of innocent people in capital cases. Our democracy is strongest when government operates in the light, not in the dark.

The **Interfaith Alliance of Pennsylvania** has no specific position on the abolition of the death penalty. However, TIA-PA's values include promoting the human dignity of all individuals. The current application of the death penalty in Pennsylvania is in direct conflict with this value. First and foremost, it is quite likely that innocent people are sentenced to death in the Commonwealth, which should shock the conscience of all people of faith and good will. In addition, the impact of race on death sentencing is worthy of deeper consideration, and the quality of defense counsel that poor defendants receive is a matter of concern. For either of these factors to affect the outcome of a death penalty case would be an assault upon the concept of justice as taught by various faith traditions of the world. As a practical matter, it is not clear that the death penalty has any deterrent effect. Nor is it certain that the death penalty has a positive effect on victims' family members, as promoted by some public officials. All of these issues lead The Interfaith Alliance of Pennsylvania to believe that the state government should establish a study commission to examine how capital punishment operates in Pennsylvania, accompanied by a two-year suspension of executions.

The Jewish Social Policy Action Network (JSPAN) is an organization of American Jews who seek, among other things, to protect the Constitutional liberties and civil rights of Jews, other minorities, and the weak in our society and to secure for ourselves and society the benefits of Jewish learning and culture. JSPAN prides itself on being a voice

for the Jewish community, articulating progressive principles drawn from Jewish tradition. We join the Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition because the death penalty is one of the matters of highest priority to the entire American Jewish community, and the death penalty as currently applied in Pennsylvania is an utter failure, a Constitutional disgrace, and fundamentally at odds with traditional Jewish law and teachings.

There are serious and substantial flaws inherent in our system of administering the death penalty in Pennsylvania. The risks of executing an innocent person are all too real, and the consequences are irreversible. The risks of error are compounded by inadequate representation by counsel, cultural biases, socio-economic inequalities, and many other factors. Viable alternatives to capital punishment that better serve our community's interests exist. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the National Council of Synagogues, among others in the Jewish community, oppose the death penalty. Others in the Jewish community, including the Union of Orthodox Congregations of America, support a moratorium on executions pending a comprehensive review of how the death penalty is administered in American courts. Accordingly, we believe that establishing a commission to study the death penalty and suspending the death penalty pending the outcome of that study is the very least the Pennsylvania government can do.

The **League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania** is proud to be part of the Coalition. The members of LWV have been calling for a moratorium on the death penalty in our State for several years, having taken that position after studying its application here. One of the factors which particularly persuaded them was that a committee of the State Supreme Court had concluded that a moratorium was necessary because of the inequities in its application. And, because of the League's enduring support for rational government, we were also concerned about the huge cost of each sentence of death. This money could be spent much more effectively in ways which would reduce crime levels. The LWV enthusiastically endorses the call for a Moratorium.

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights is participating in the Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition because we believe the execution of any individual is a violation of the rights of that person, as defined in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. We believe that, as persons who have had family members murdered, we are uniquely qualified to speak on this issue.

Thus we do not approach this topic lightly. We do so out of concern for the rights of offenders, and out of concern for victims' families, who rarely find healing through the execution of the offender. We call upon the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to look seriously at this issue, and to explore how the money now being spent in pursuing the death penalty can be used more productively by offering more victims' services, and providing, as well, social services that will aid in crime prevention.

The **Pennsylvania Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers** opposes the death penalty. We join the Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition to encourage the commonwealth of Pennsylvania to suspend executions and study the current practice of capital punishment as a first step in addressing the many concerns surrounding this divisive issue.

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches endorses a vision of criminal justice that is based on equal justice for all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, or economic resources. As Christians, we speak from the perspective that the message of a Messiah that was unjustly executed is one that places a moral imperative on ending state sponsored executions.

The ministry of Christ and the teachings of the prophets form the basis of the Council's position on the death penalty. Jesus spoke against hatred and for love at every turn; putting someone to death, whether as an individual or government, is not an act of love. The death penalty is an act of retribution, not justice. Jesus spoke against the

retribution—“an eye for an eye”—and encouraged the eternally revolutionary mandate to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

The finality of the death penalty raises fairness as a standard to a level that currently does not exist in our criminal justice system. Because of this, the Council opposes the death penalty in any form. We believe that it is not a deterrent to crime, is economically costly, and is often racist and classist in its application.

However, knowing the political will does not exist to abolish the death penalty at this time, the Council supports a moratorium on further executions. A moratorium would provide time for an examination of the injustices associated with the death penalty in Pennsylvania. That is why we have joined with the coalition assembled here today to call upon our General Assembly to enact a moratorium on the death penalty at the earliest possible time.

Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (PADP) is a proud member of the Pennsylvania Moratorium Coalition. Reflective of the majority of Pennsylvania’s citizens, PADP adamantly supports a moratorium on the death penalty so that its current practices can be reviewed and sufficiently addressed. It is urgent to suspend and study the death penalty because it is proven to be discriminatory. PADP recognized that the death penalty is sentenced and administered disproportionately by race, economic status and region. There is no guarantee against wrongful executions; in fact, six people were nearly executed in Pennsylvania despite their innocence. Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty strives to improve the criminal justice system by eliminating the use of death sentences because such a system does not deter crime, save tax dollars or relieve the grief of victims’ families. PADP urges the commonwealth of Pennsylvania to embrace a moratorium on the death penalty and end the cycle of violence.

Witness to Innocence, a national organization based in Philadelphia composed of exonerated former death row prisoners and family members, supports legislation that would impose a moratorium on executions in Pennsylvania. As part of the Pennsylvania

Moratorium Coalition, Witness to Innocence is deeply concerned about the unfairness and arbitrariness with which the death penalty is applied in the Commonwealth. Since the reinstatement of the death penalty in Pennsylvania, six people have been exonerated and released from death row, while three people have been executed during that same period. These six individuals spent a combined total of nearly 60 years on death row for crimes they did not commit.

Inadequate legal representation, police and prosecutorial misconduct, and false eyewitness testimony are among the problems that have continually surfaced in Pennsylvania's death penalty system. With more than 220 people on death row – almost none of whom were able to afford a lawyer – it is clear that the Commonwealth is at risk of executing someone who may be innocent. Witness to Innocence calls for an immediate moratorium on all executions in Pennsylvania.