

## **OREGONIANS FOR ALTERNATIVES TO THE DEATH PENALTY**

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### **We the people are the state**

Some people feel that the State has a responsibility to protect its citizens and executions are the surest way to provide protection against murderers.

In the abstract, people may feel that it is the responsibility of the State and the State should carry out the execution. But, we are the State. The people are the State. When there is an execution, everyone is responsible, yet a few citizens are asked to carry out the task of killing another human being.

Frank Thompson, who was the Superintendent of the Oregon State Prison when there were executions in 1996 and 1997, will testify that it was a harrowing experience to be responsible for preparation and carrying out an execution. The good men and women who work in the prison are placed in a situation that few, if any, citizen would want to take on. When life without parole is an option, it makes no sense to have state employees be asked to participate in such an act. The task is made even harder when one considers that there is the possibility that a mistake has been made and an innocent person is executed.

The possibility of executing an innocent person is too high of a risk to undertake. The alternative provides for public safety, punishment for the offender and avoids any possibility of a fatal mistake.

Dave Cook, former Director of the Department of Corrections, concurs with Mr. Thompson. ... "It is my belief that the death penalty is a failed public policy for three specific reasons. First, few, if any, murderers are deterred by the threat of being prosecuted and sentenced to a penalty of death. Second, through my conversations with both of the Oregon death row inmates who were executed I believe in their minds the more severe form of punishment would have been a life of confinement and not the act of execution. Finally: For me this is the most closely held belief..... Moral and civilized societies do not execute convicted inmates when just punishment alternatives exist."

Do mistakes happen? There have been 142 mistakes, as represented by the 142 people exonerated after spending many years on death row, for crimes they did not commit. There are many people who believe that Troy Davis was an innocent man, yet the State of Georgia executed him in 2011. Criminal investigators and forensic experts are very sure that Carlos de Luna and Cameron Todd Willingham were innocent when executed in Texas.

Have mistakes happened in Oregon as well? There is no claim that an innocent person has been executed here, but changing the most severe penalty for aggravated murder to life without the possibility of parole, makes sure it does not happen in the future.