

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/death-penalty-poster-child>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

[Skip to main content](#)

Alva E. Campbell Jr. is scheduled to be executed at 10 a.m. on November 15th at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, OH. It will be the third execution this year in Ohio, following a moratorium on the death penalty after a severely botched execution took place in 2014. After Campbell Jr., [four](#) other executions are scheduled for 2018.

On April 2, 1997, while on parole (after serving a 20-year sentence for homicide), Campbell, Jr. forced a deputy sheriff to surrender her handgun, and hijacked the car of 18-year-old Charles D. Dials. After driving three hours around Columbus, OH, Alva shot Charles twice in the head, killing him. Later, he tried to repeat the hijacking and finally got caught by police while hiding in trees - read more about his case [here](#). During his trial, Franklin County Prosecutor - Ron OBrien - called Alva *the poster child of the death penalty*.

If being a victim of sexual and physical abuse as a child, as well as suffering from mental illness means being *the poster child* of the death penalty in the United States the system is severely flawed. The reality is that people like Campbell, Jr. should not have been sentenced to capital punishment in the first place, and their execution may be in violation of the Eighth Amendment that states: *Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted*. David Stebbins, Alvas attorney stated that [Campbells abuse and neglect by his parents was the worst I have seen in 35 years of doing capital cases](#).

Today, 69-year-old Alva, in addition to mental illness, suffers from a chronic lung disease. On October 19, he was rehearsing his execution, when he suffered from breathing problems that made officials change the normal procedure and decide to **put him to death in a reclining position**. As the execution approaches, new concerns for Alva arise, including the condition of his **veins that may not be suitable for administering the lethal concoction**. Unreliable veins have led to past botched executions in Ohio, and could happen again.

Please let me explain what my restorative justice approach is to this case: after all, I do not try to diminish what happened to an 18-year old young man being hijacked in his car and shot twice and killed. I do not want to diminish his nor his familys pain nor his loss of life. The point is, **taking Alvas life is an easy ritual of tooth for a tooth that makes all of us overlook important societal problems** such as those that primarily cause the lack of safety for us and our loved ones. Yet, it would be much harder for Governor John Kasich to admit that and try to work with the legislature on amending broken policies, than to let a **person not only mentally incompetent, but also incompetent for the death penalty itself, to be executed**.

Capital punishment will not prevent other Alvas from being produced by a broken society that fails to care for those who experience trauma, two thirds of death row inhabitants suffer from childhood trauma and one fourth have serious mental and intellectual disabilities. After all, the premise of punishment is to understand what a person was doing at the time he or she committed the crime. When a person has limited consciousness and is incompetent, the rational thing would be to ensure that these individuals receive comprehensive and effective mental health care, and even better to medically treat that person before the crime is committed.

Killing Alva will not help anyone, but **providing adequate mental health-care and support for battered youth could stop the vicious cycle of violence**. Take note, the **prison system in Ohio is the largest provider of mental services** in the state. According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), more than 400k people nationwide **are behind the bars with mental illnesses, a number larger than the entire population of the city of Cleveland**. Moreover, it is estimated that **between 25 to 40 percent of Americans with mental-health conditions will be incarcerated in their lifetime**.

And yet we still think the death penalty will address these problems.

** ukasz W. Niparko LL.M., was a Humanity In Action Fellow (HIA) at the ACLU of Ohio. He graduated from the European University Viadrina with a degree in international human rights and humanitarian law. Prior to coming to the ACLU, ukasz served with various NGOs such as The Association for Legal Intervention, The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, and Polish Humanitarian Action.*

Stay informed

2022 ACLU of Ohio