

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/paying-price-race-death-penalty-priorities-ohio>

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Following the botched execution of Dennis McGuire in Ohio early last year and other similar bungled executions across the country, death penalty opponents have been calling for reform.

In a recent [article](#), former Governor Bob Taft (R) argued that the escalating price tag of the death penalty should warrant reconsideration of its use in Ohio. The impact of the death penalty on the states budget is indeed an issue the *Cincinnati Enquirer* estimated in 2010 that death row prisoners could [cost taxpayers up to \\$1 million](#).

Its unfortunate, however, that some see financial costs as the only issue when considering the future of capital punishment. They neglect the racial disparity of the death penalty in Ohio.

A Constant Problem

Racial injustice in death penalty cases has been documented in the state since the 1990s. [The Ohio Commission on Racial Justice](#) determined that given the strength of the testimony presented, it was impossible to escape the conclusion that components of the criminal justice system were out to get minorities.

According to Ohioans To Stop Executions, the race of the defendant has a major effect on cases where the death sentence may be imposed. Defendants charged with killing a white victim are [two times more likely](#) to receive a death sentence than those charged with killing a black victim.

There are currently [141 prisoners on death row](#); 53 percent of them are people of color. [The American Bar Association report on capital punishment in Ohio in 2007](#) determined that the state neither studied the issue of racial bias in death sentences nor implemented reforms to eliminate racial bias in death sentencing.

Reopening the Discussion

The Joint Task Force on Ohios Death Penalty released its report just over a year ago, stipulating a number of recommendations on combatting racial bias. Among them:

Read the Ohio Supreme Court task forces [full report](#) on the death penalty in Ohio.

State Senator Charleta Tavares (D) recently proposed Senate Bill 67, [The Racial Justice Act](#), to implement the task forces recommendations. While the bill does not abolish the death penalty in Ohio, its an important step in addressing racial bias in death penalty cases.

With the [recent stay on executions until 2016](#), theres an opportunity for the state to reform fairness in capital punishment. People of color in our criminal justice system face inequity at many different points. In Ohio, reconsideration on the use of capital punishment also should focus on equality and justice, as well as the right to life, as many conservatives noted in Nebraska two weeks ago.

Governor John Kasich (R) in a [interview](#) last month spoke about the use of the death penalty as justice for victims and their families. What about tackling the inherent injustice of racial bias in death penalty cases?

As high as the economic costs can be, they cant amount to the price of a life.

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