

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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CLEVELAND, OH After over two years of investigation, careful research and robust discussion, a joint taskforce of judges, prosecutors, criminal defense attorneys, legal scholars, and legislators have found serious flaws in the system and responded with a series of 56 recommendations for reform. Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor formed the taskforce following reports by the American Bar Association, Associated Press, and League of Women Voters that all outlined fundamental problems with Ohio's death penalty system. The Taskforce was specifically charged with examining how the system was administered and not with questioning whether the state should continue its use of the death penalty.

The taskforce recommendations include:

Today's recommendations confirm what many people already knew: Ohio's death penalty is broken and it's long past time to address these fundamental problems, said ACLU of Ohio Director of Communications and Public Policy Mike Brickner. This well-respected panel of experts has identified several critical changes that must be implemented for our system to be fair. Ohio has had enough death penalty problems. Now is the time for reform, if not replacement of this flawed system.

The recommendations arrive amidst renewed questions about Ohio's application of the death penalty. State authorities have botched four executions in six years, granted clemency to a number of severely mentally ill prisoners, and face a growing list of officials—including two Ohio Supreme Court justices and a former corrections chief—who have turned against the system. Most recently, people all across the country were horrified by the drawn-out execution of Dennis McGuire.

Even for death penalty supporters, today's recommendations should be welcome. At the very least, Ohioans should not tolerate a system that executes people with mental illness, risks executing the innocent, and perpetuates unfair discrimination in our justice system, said Brickner. If Ohioans insist on keeping the death penalty, officials must do all they can to address these fundamental problems.

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