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Abolishing the Death Penalty

The death penalty continues to be a debated topic nationwide. While many argue the death penalty is a just and fair form of punishment, others argue it creates immense cost to taxpayers, violates human rights, and leads to sentencing innocent people to death. According to the article, "The Death Penalty Must Be Abolished," published in *Scientific American*, "Capital punishment was halted in the U.S. in 1972 but reinstated in 1976, and since then, nearly 1,600 people have been executed. Through the death penalty, the criminal justice system has killed at least 20 people now believed to have been innocent and uncounted others whose cases have not been reexamined" (66-7). This staggering statistic illustrates a fraction of the many flaws to the death penalty. Hence, the death penalty should be abolished and a more cost effective, fair, and just form of punishment should be implemented.

One of the many concerns regarding the death penalty is the cost to taxpayers. The system requires a lot of money to run due to complex and long legal proceedings and the cost of housing inmates on death row for long periods of time. Additionally, the process of carrying out lethal injections adds to this cost due to medication shortages and the need for willing medical personnel. These costs often surpass that of life imprisonment and illustrate the financial burden the death penalty places on taxpayers.

People on death row often spend years, sometimes decades, waiting for their cases to go through multiple appeals. Each stage of appeal is meant to cut back on injustices, but they still

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occur. These drawn-out cases require expensive forensic experts, mental health professionals, and legal teams who are paid for by taxpayers. According to the article, “Discriminatory, Costly, Death Penalty Lives On,” by Robert Drinan, in *National Catholic Reporter*, “California alone spends \$90 million per year to litigate the cases of those on death row. These costs are in every case far greater than maintaining a prisoner for life” (15). These costs pile up on top of the regular expenses of housing, food, and medical care while waiting for execution.

Housing death row inmates is also expensive. To ensure safety, inmates are usually kept separate from the general population, requiring more security and more staff. These inmates require constant, direct supervision to protect against violence, escape, and suicide attempts. Furthermore, by the time the legal process is completed, the state has spent years paying to feed, clothe, and provide medical care to those on death row as they age before carrying out the execution.

The execution itself is also costly for taxpayers. In cases of lethal injection, trained medical professionals are involved in performing the execution, and many refuse to participate due to medical ethic concerns. On top of that, the drugs needed for lethal injection are often difficult and expensive to obtain because companies do not want to be associated with this process. Additionally, extra staff must be hired to oversee the execution. According to Robert Drinan’s article, “Discriminatory, Costly, Death Penalty Lives On,” in *National Catholic Reporter*, “The cost to taxpayers of the 56 executions in 1995 is estimated in a Duke University study to be \$121 million. That sum would have hired 3,000 police officers at \$40,000 each” (15).

Aside from the cost to taxpayers, the death penalty also violates human rights. The death penalty sacrifices one life for another to provide justice, violating the basic right to life. The system is not conducted fairly because many individuals on death row are discriminated

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