



Seizing the Momentum

Spring 2016

Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty

Beyond our borders: The state of the death penalty across the United States

Recent headlines make it impossible to ignore the declining support for the death penalty. Across the country, states are enacting legislation that repeals and reforms the use of the death penalty, while media outlets and voters are questioning it, as well. Each state may be at a different stage in the journey, but the destination for all is clear: our nation's 40-year failed experiment with the death penalty is coming to an end. Here is a snapshot of efforts around the country:

Repeal Efforts

Utah may seem like an unlikely place for successful repeal of the death penalty. Just last year, Utah legislators passed a law bringing back the firing squad as a method of execution. In 2016, however, prosecutors and legislators led the charge for abolition.

According to **Ralph Dellapiana**, Founder and Director of Utahans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, the issues that got the most traction in Utah were: (1) The death penalty costs millions of extra dollars and that money is wasted because the prosecutions result in an execution in only 1 out of 100 death-eligible cases, and (2) Because the appeals drag on for decades it harms the families of victims because their emotional wounds are torn open time and time again and they never have any closure.

Dellapiana also credits the growing support from conservatives like Utah State Senator Stephen Urquhart, a former supporter of the firing squad bill, who recently authored the bill seeking abolition. Urquhart's bill passed the Utah Senate and the House Judiciary Committee with bipartisan support, but was unable to move any further due to the session closing.

Dellapiana explains, "The bill passed in the Senate and made it to the floor of the House. We had about 80% of the votes we needed in the House but ran out of time in the hectic last days of the session to educate the remaining legislators that we needed to bring the bill to a final vote."

Reform in Florida

On March 7, 2016, Florida **Governor Rick Scott** signed into law a bill limiting the powers of judges in death penalty cases. The bill was a reaction to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Hurst v. Florida* on January 12, 2016, which found Florida's practices unconstitutional. Prior to the law, judges could hand down a death penalty sentence without a unanimous decision from the jury. The new law requires at least ten juror votes. Only Florida, Delaware, and Alabama allow the death penalty without a unanimous jury decision. Both Delaware and Alabama's death penalty procedures are currently under review.

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Scheduled Executions 2016

April

6– Pablo Vasquez (Executed)

May

NO EXECUTIONS

June

2– Charles Flores

21– Robert Roberson



Lethal Injection and Secrecy

In April, Virginia Governor **Terry McAuliffe** rejected a bill that would have used the electric chair as an alternative to lethal injection. He cited his concern for humanity as the reason behind his veto. In an attempt to keep the death penalty on the table, however, he offered instead an amendment to shield the identities of compounding pharmacies providing lethal injection drugs. The amendment proposed by Gov. McAuliffe states that pharmacies' identifying information, "shall be confidential, shall be exempt from the Freedom of Information Act . . . and shall not be subject to discovery or introduction as evidence in any civil proceeding unless good cause is shown." Many states, including Texas, have enacted similar secrecy bills. The Senate approved the bill as amended on April 20, 2016.

On March 21, 2016, Cole County, Missouri Circuit **Judge Jon Beetem** ruled that Missouri must release the names of pharmacies that have provided lethal injection drugs for executions. The ACLU of Missouri and several media organizations filed three separate suits against the state for a violation of first amendment rights. In addition to releasing pharmacy information, the court awarded the plaintiffs over \$100,000 for attorney fees.

Changing Opinions in Kentucky

Legislators aren't the only ones voicing concern over the death penalty. Recently, Kentucky's second-largest newspaper, the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, called for abolition. Until now, the paper supported the death penalty with the position of "keep it but fix it." Editors now believe, "[Kentucky] must concede that the death penalty is not going to be fixed and, in fact, probably cannot be fixed at any defensible cost to taxpayers."

The Death Penalty at the Polls

The death penalty will appear on the ballots in both California and Nebraska in November. In California, voters will decide if life in prison without possibility of parole should replace the death penalty. This would also apply retroactively to the 748 men and women currently on death row. Nebraskans will have the opportunity to retain the 2015 legislative bill that abolished the death penalty.

"The death penalty is being eliminated or reduced all around the country and the progress we made in Utah this year shows that it will soon be repealed here too. We are now redoubling our efforts to make another run at repeal in our next legislative session which begins in January. **And if we can do it in Utah, it can be done anywhere.**"

Ralph Dellapiana,
Founder and Director of Utahans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

TCADP Welcomes New Board Member



Ana Ramon was elected to the TCADP Board of Directors during the General Members Meeting at the TCADP 2016 Annual Conference on February 20, 2016. Ana is a resident of San Antonio, Texas. She has years of experience working in the Texas Legislature, most recently as Chief of Staff for State Representative Farias. Ana is passionate about criminal justice reform and abolishing the death penalty. She is a graduate of St. Mary's University and serves as Chairwoman of the Texas Arbor Day Committee, and is a member of Phi Sigma Tau Philosophy Honors Fraternity. The members elected **DJ Compton** and **Casey Magnuson** to full terms, as well; both joined the board last summer.

Ana Ramon at 2016 TCADP
Annual Conference



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Jason Redick, North Texas Outreach Coordinator

Seizing the Momentum

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Texas Death Penalty Developments in 2016 (as of April 27, 2016)

Executions: 6 out of 12 nationwide

Scheduled executions (through October): 8

States that have carried out executions this year: 4 (Texas, Georgia, Alabama, and Florida)

States where executions are currently on hold: 12, including Ohio, Oklahoma, and Arkansas

Individuals currently on death row in Texas: 244

New death sentences: 0

Capital murder trials underway: 3 (Bell, Kaufman, and Webb County)

More information is available at
www.tcadp.org.



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28 new donors

\$8,021.40

1-2PM Champions
4th year in a row



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**TCADP on
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View photos from our events, connect with more than 4,600 other supporters, and learn about important death penalty developments. "Like" us today!



Ending the Death Penalty...It's a Family Affair

By Kristin Houlé



Nancy Cobb at 2016
TCADP Annual
Conference

"Grandmothers-in-law." That's the name that **Mardi Baron** and **Nancy Cobb**, both of San Antonio, came up with to describe their relationship to each other. Mardi and Nancy have something else in common: they're both members of TCADP, a fact they only recently discovered despite knowing one another for more than six years. Nancy's son and Mardi's daughter married in 2009; they have one son, with twins on the way.

Mardi explains, "I joined TCADP last year and the first time I re-posted one of the organization's posts [on Facebook], Nancy commented immediately to say that she had already been a member for a long time! We discovered through Facebook that we had another thing in common that we hadn't even know about... I guess we have always been busy talking kids and grandchild!"

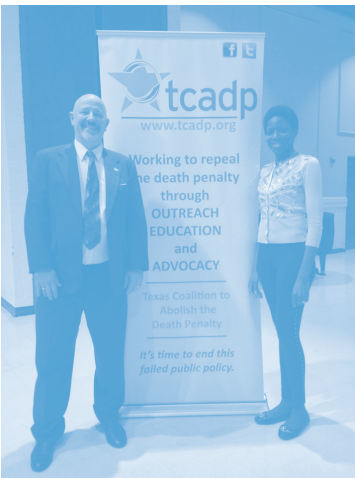


Mardi Baron at 2016
TCADP Annual
Conference

The grandmothers recently traveled together from San Antonio to Houston to participate in the TCADP 2016 Annual Conference.

"I think it has changed our relationship to the extent we have a common bond other than our family," Nancy says. "Any grandmothers working together for a worthy cause increases the bounty of life and sets a good example not only for our children but all."

Mardi agrees, "This connection gave us the opportunity to take a road trip together. We were able to spend hours talking about this important issue and enjoyed the opportunity to just spend time getting to know one another better, as well. I think that our friendship, affection and mutual respect has deepened. We are GILs (grandmothers-in-law) but also friends!"



Les Breeding and Shannon Haynes
Breeding at the 2014 TCADP Annual
Conference

The TCADP Annual Conference has created deeper connections among members across the state. It even led to at least one marriage (that we know about...!). Former TCADP Board Member **Les Breeding** met his wife, **Shannon Haynes Breeding**, at our 2011 gathering in Austin. "It's wonderful to work side by side with someone that is as passionate about ending the death penalty as I am," Shannon declares. "It would have never happened if it weren't for the TCADP conference!"

Former TCADP Board Member **Pat Monks'** children each attended a TCADP Annual Conference, on separate occasions. Pat says, "I believe preaching to our kids is one thing, but seeing is believing. Both my children, as young teenagers, soaked up everything said at our conference. I was amazed how they formed their own opinions based on the values that I have tried to teach them."

Working to end the death penalty has brought family members together in other ways, as well. TCADP's first Lobby Day at the State Capitol in Austin back in 2009 involved three generations of Van Steenburgs: former Board President **Bob Van Steenburg** and former Board Member **Jean Van Steenburg**, their son, **Eric**, and

grandson, **Robbie**.

Eric and his wife, **Julie**, who now live in Bozeman, Montana, are TCADP Sustaining Members. According to Eric, he and Julie "are supporters of the effort by TCADP not only because my parents were heavily involved in the past, but because it's the right thing to do. Growing up in a household based on Judeo-Christian ethics, we were taught to respect all life, and that only God can judge. And now, with the rising number of convictions being overturned demonstrating the fallibility of the judicial process, an organization like TCADP is working for



Vanessa, Lynn, and Tony Akins at 2016 TCADP Annual Conference

TCADP receives tremendous support from the sons, daughters, siblings, in-laws, and parents of members across the country, particularly the family members of our staff and current and former board members. I am proud to say that my own parents, **John Houlé** and **Kathy Hayden**, were our very first Partners for Justice (TCADP's recurring giving program), and Vanessa's parents recently joined the program, as well.

Being involved in a social justice movement isn't just about taking action on an issue but about the relationships we forge and the connections we make along the way. People – and families – have always been at the heart of TCADP and our organization will continue to bring people together for the common cause of justice.

The Company We Keep: Amnesty International Releases Annual Global Death Penalty Report

On April 6, 2016, Amnesty International released its annual global report, "Death Sentences and Executions 2015." As the name indicates, the report covers the judicial use of the death penalty throughout the world from January to December 2015.

At least 1,634 people were put to death worldwide in 2015, which was 573 more executions than documented in 2014. This startling rise in executions is due to a dramatic increase from three countries: Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. It's important to note this total does not include executions in China, where Amnesty is not able to obtain accurate information. Amnesty projects the People's Republic of China executed more than 1,000 people in 2015.

Despite an increase in executions, there were positive changes in 2015. Four countries abolished the death penalty: Madagascar, Fiji, Suriname, and the Republic of Congo. In total, 140 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

With 28 executions, the United States had its lowest number of executions since 1991. Amnesty notes this drop is due in part to legal challenges involving lethal injection drugs and protocols. Even with a drop in executions, the United States continues to be an outlier and remains among the top five executing countries, behind China, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

In terms of executions, the State of Texas is an outlier within an outlier, accounting for 13 of the 28 executions last year. If Texas were its own country, it would be among the top 10 executing jurisdictions in the world.

In 2015, the United States only had 53 new death sentences from 15 jurisdictions. This is the lowest number since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976. Although the State of Texas continues to actively carry out executions, it contributed only 3 death sentences to the 53 across the country. This decrease in death sentences indicates a positive trend for abolition in Texas and the United States.

Amnesty International's *Death Sentences and Executions 2015* is available online at: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/death-sentences-and-executions-2015>.



Thank You for Your Generous Support

TCADP thanks the following individuals and organizations for your generous contributions between January 20 and April 27, 2016. Your financial support is critical to all of the activities and events described in this newsletter. We are particularly grateful to everyone who contributed to our 2016 Amplify Austin campaign, including those donors who wish to remain anonymous. Please let us know if we inadvertently left you or anyone in your household off of this list. We apologize in advance if we missed anyone.

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thank
you!



Jason Redick with Texas voters opposing the death penalty at Cesar Chavez Celebration in Dallas on April 2, 2016

As the calendar and seasons change, the ground continues to shift in North Texas. At the end of January, I joined other members of TCADP's Lobby Corps to deliver our 2015 Year-End Report to every legislator at the Capitol in Austin. We had robust conversations with many legislators' offices representing North Texans. Since this an election year, we will continue to bring the death penalty forward as an issue that needs to be addressed by local and state leaders.

Over the last couple months, I've attended a number of political, community, and religious events in the region. I've discovered more and more Texans are questioning the death penalty each and every day. Some of the more meaningful encounters I've had are with people who have had a direct experience with someone on death row. Their stories are powerful, and their resolve to join our fight to end the death

penalty is incredibly inspiring. They often ask me "Jason, what can I do to help end the death penalty in Texas?" Stay tuned for opportunities to hear and/or read their stories in the coming months as our working relationships grow and we begin planning events to highlight their voices.

Also, in the coming months I will continue the work of building the Coalition up here in North Texas by garnering more Faith Leader signatures to our *Interfaith Statement of Opposition to the Death Penalty*, growing our list of signatures for *Statement of Support for Repeal from Current and Elected Officials in Texas*, and increasing our Organizational Affiliates.



Jason Redick with Dr. Cornel West at The Justice League of Texas

May we all continue to ask ourselves what we can do to end the death penalty in Texas!

Know a Faith Leader in North Texas?

Invite them to have lunch and a faithful conversation about the death penalty with Jason!



LUNCH
PROVIDED

You're invited to
**A FAITHFUL CONVERSATION
ON THE DEATH PENALTY**
with Dallas area faith
leaders

WHEN Thursday, May 19th
11:30AM-1:00PM

WHERE Mix Coworking Space
(White Rock UMC)
9125 Diceman
Dallas, TX 75218

RSVP email jason@tcadp.org
Monday, May 16th

INFO visit TCADP.org for
more information

Find more information
about these and other
events at tcadp.org/attend-events.



LUNCH
PROVIDED

You're invited to
**A FAITHFUL CONVERSATION
ON THE DEATH PENALTY**
with Fort Worth area
faith leaders

WHEN Wednesday, May 25th
11:30AM-1:00PM

WHERE Mamma Mia
1000 W Magnolia
Fort Worth, TX 76104

RSVP email jason@tcadp.org
Monday, May 23rd

INFO visit TCADP.org for
more information

TCADP 2016 Annual Conference: At the Epicenter of the Death Penalty

February 20, 2016

Houston, Texas

Thank you to everyone who helped make the TCADP 2016 Conference a success! Please visit our Facebook page for more photos provided by Omar Marcos Photography, www.facebook.com/tcadp.

