

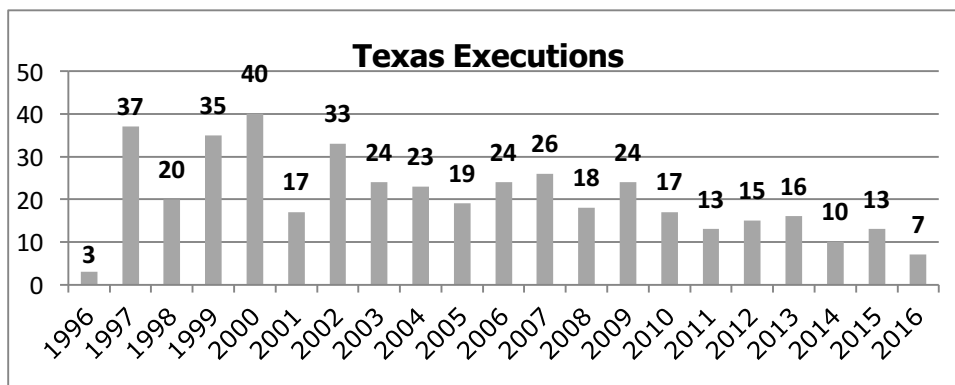
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2016, 12:01 AM CDT**

**CONTACT:** Kristin Houlé, TCADP Executive Director  
512-441-1808 (office)  
512-552-5948 (cell)  
[khoule@tcadp.org](mailto:khoule@tcadp.org)

**State of Texas carries out fewest executions in two decades**

*Death sentences remain at record-low level; state's highest criminal court stayed seven executions*

**(Austin, Texas)** — The State of Texas executed seven people in 2016, the lowest number of executions in two decades. Seven other individuals with execution dates received reprieves from the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. It was only the second time since the resumption of executions in 1982 that no African-Americans were put to death in Texas.



In addition to the decline in executions, death sentences remained at historic low levels in 2016. According to the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty's (TCADP) new report, *Texas Death Penalty Developments in 2016: The Year in Review*, for the second consecutive year, jurors in Texas condemned just three individuals to death. A jury rejected the death penalty in a fourth trial. Over the last two years, juries have rejected the death penalty in nearly as many cases as they imposed it.

"The death penalty landscape in Texas continues to change dramatically," said Kristin Houlé, TCADP Executive Director. "Prosecutors, juries, judges, and the public are subjecting our state's death penalty practices to unprecedented scrutiny and, in many cases, accepting alternatives to the ultimate punishment."

For the second year in a row, there were no new death sentences in Harris or Dallas Counties; together, those two counties have sent more than 400 people to death row since 1974 and account for 181 executions. Also, for only the second time in ten years, no one was resentenced to death in Texas this year.

As use of the death penalty declines, its application remains geographically isolated and racially biased. Just seven counties account for approximately two-thirds of new death sentences in Texas since 2012. Over the last five years, 80% of death sentences have been imposed on people of color. All three men sentenced to death this year are African-American.

In Texas' highest sentencing counties, these patterns of racial bias are even more pronounced: all nine men sentenced to death in Dallas or Tarrant County since 2012 are African-American. Fifteen of the last eighteen defendants sentenced to death in Harris County are African-American and the other three are Hispanic.

Although the State of Texas accounted for more than one-third of all U.S. executions in 2016 (7 out of 20), for the first time since 2002, it was not the nation's busiest execution chamber. That dubious distinction went to Georgia, which put nine people to death this year.

Nearly half of the individuals executed by the State of Texas over the last two years had a significant impairment. This includes one individual with intellectual disabilities, one with severe mental illness, and six men who were under the age of 21 at the time of their crimes; one individual who was 19 at the time of the crime also suffered from severe mental illness.

Five individuals received reduced sentences and were removed from death row in 2016. Two other individuals – Max Soffar and Jack Smith – died in prison after spending more than three decades on death row.

Since 2012, a total of 26 individuals have been removed from death row in Texas due to reduced sentences (18), deaths in custody (7), or exonerations (1). Half of these cases originated in Harris County. During this same time period, the State executed 61 people.

In addition to granting seven stays of execution, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals (CCA) remanded several other cases for consideration of claims related to faulty forensic science and prosecutorial misconduct, among other issues. In an extremely rare decision, the CCA reversed the conviction and death sentence of Albert Love on direct appeal on December 7. According to Texas Defender Service, the CCA did not reverse a single conviction in a death penalty case on direct appeal from 2009 through 2015.

Over the last two years, the CCA has granted 15 stays of execution. From 2012 through 2014, the Court granted a total of three stays.

“The rising number of stays suggests that the Court of Criminal Appeals is registering the concerns about the fairness and accuracy of our state's capital punishment system,” said

Kathryn Kase, Executive Director of Texas Defender Service. “These stays give the Court opportunities to remedy the failures of past death penalty practices for which Texas has been roundly criticized.”

“The chorus of voices raising concerns about the death penalty is growing louder every day,” said Kristin Houlé. “At this critical moment in our state’s experience with the death penalty, concerned citizens and elected officials should take a closer look at the realities of this irreversible, arbitrary, and costly punishment and pursue alternative means of achieving justice.”

TCADP is a statewide, grassroots advocacy organization based in Austin.

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*Texas Death Penalty Developments in 2016: The Year in Review* is available online at <http://bit.ly/2hNMUDg>. Contact report author Kristin Houlé at [khoule@tcadp.org](mailto:khoule@tcadp.org) to receive a copy directly by email. See the report for additional tables and graphs.

Maps illustrating death sentences by county are available here:

<http://tcadp.org/get-informed/death-sentences-by-county/1974-2016-county-map/>

<http://tcadp.org/get-informed/death-sentences-by-county/2012-2016-new-death-sentences/>