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Nearly 100 Criminal Justice Leaders Call for an Immediate End to the Federal Death Penalty

Current and Former Prosecutors, Law Enforcement Leaders, and Former U.S. Attorneys and DOJ Officials Call for Halt of Scheduled Federal Executions

Today, a bipartisan group of nearly 100 criminal justice leaders — including over 60 current elected prosecutors (District Attorneys, State Attorneys, Prosecuting Attorneys and Attorneys General), nine former U.S. Attorneys and 14 current and former Police Chiefs and Sheriffs — issued a joint statement calling for an immediate halt to federal executions and asking the President to commute the sentences of the [five people](#) now scheduled to be executed by the federal government over the next two months. The signatories warn that a rush to carry out executions in the midst of a pandemic, and in the final days of the current administration, would compromise trust in the American legal system and perpetuate a deeply flawed and unjust process.

“The death penalty is a cruel, ineffective, unjust punishment. It is ripe with racial bias, is often used against the most vulnerable among us, leaves us no chance to correct wrongful convictions, and does nothing to improve public safety. Rushing to execute people in the midst of a presidential transition and at a time when COVID-19 is surging would seriously undermine the public’s already-damaged trust in the justice system, and thus erode public safety,” said **Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of Fair and Just Prosecution**, the organizer of the statement and a former federal prosecutor who also signed on to the statement. “This administration has a chance to show us that it values fairness, justice and compassion over vengeance — I hope they take it.”

The United States was one of only [20 countries](#), and the only [Western democracy](#), to use the death penalty last year and is far [more likely](#) to impose the punishment in cases involving Black defendants or white victims. Since 1973, at least [172](#) people on death row have been exonerated, while the National Academy of Sciences [estimates](#) that over 4 percent of death row prisoners are innocent. The COVID-19 pandemic has only magnified concerns with application of the death penalty, making it impossible for many attorneys to effectively represent their clients, investigate last-minute leads, introduce new witness testimony, or even see their clients in person.

The statement calls on the President to commute all outstanding federal death sentences to life imprisonment. This is “an extreme punishment, commensurate with the most egregious of crimes,” the law enforcement and criminal justice leaders argue, but avoids the injustice and flawed process inherent in the application of the death penalty.

“We know that the justice system makes mistakes, and the death penalty takes away any ability to recognize or repair that damage,” said **Shameca Collins, District Attorney for Mississippi’s Sixth Judicial District** and a signatory to the joint statement. “When we choose death, it is irreversible: we

can never go back and overturn a wrongful conviction, address a racially charged process, or recoup the tremendous costs and decades of litigation inherent in the death penalty. Mercy, however, is never the wrong choice.”

The signatories also point to the inextricable connection between trust in the justice system and public safety: “When people believe the state is executing a person, or applying the death penalty, unjustly – as do many in our nation who oppose the death penalty in increasing numbers – their trust in our system of government and law enforcement is undermined. Our jobs get harder, as do the jobs of others who seek to keep our communities safe.”

“As a longtime law enforcement leader, former Police Chief and former president of the National Police Foundation, I have been committed for decades to promoting public safety. Yet many members of our community recognize that the death penalty is arbitrary, cruel, and often racially-biased.” said **Jim Bueerman, former Chief of Police of Redlands, California and former President of the National Police Foundation**, and another signatory to the joint statement. “The use of capital punishment undermines efforts to protect communities by further eroding the fragile bonds of trust between law enforcement and the people we serve.”

The signatories include **Attorneys General Hector Balderas** (New Mexico), **Thomas J. Donovan, Jr.** (Vermont), **Keith Ellison** (Minnesota), **Kathleen Jennings** (Delaware), **Karl Racine** (District of Columbia), and **Kwame Raoul** (Illinois); **elected District Attorneys, Commonwealth Attorneys, Prosecuting Attorneys and State’s Attorneys** such as **Buta Biberaj** (Loudoun County, Virginia), **John Chisholm** (Milwaukee County, Wisconsin), **John Choi** (Ramsey County, Minnesota), **John Creuzot** (Dallas County, Texas), **Satana Deberry** (Durham County, North Carolina), **Parisa Dehghani-Tafti** (Arlington County and the City of Falls Church, Virginia), **Kimberly M. Foxx** (Cook County, Illinois), **Sarah F. George** (Chittenden County, Vermont), **Mark Gonzalez** (Nueces County, Texas), **Christian Gossett** (Winnebago County, Wisconsin), **Andrea Harrington** (Berkshire County, Massachusetts), **Justin F. Kollar** (Kauai County, Hawaii), **Lawrence S. Krasner** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), **Rachael Rollins** (Suffolk County, Massachusetts), **Dan Satterberg** (King County, Washington), and **Mike Schmidt** (Multnomah County, Oregon); **former DOJ Officials** including **Acting Attorney General Peter Keisler, Chief of Staff and Counselor to the Attorney General Margaret Richardson**, and **U.S. Attorneys Donald Ayer, W. Thomas Dillard, John Leonardo, Brett Tolman, and Joyce Vance**; and **law enforcement leaders** such as **Sheriffs Jerry L. Clayton** (Washtenaw County, Michigan), **Garry McFadden** (Mecklenburg County, North Carolina), and **Steven Tompkins** (Suffolk County, Massachusetts), **Police Chiefs Richard Biehl** (Dayton, Ohio), **RaShall M. Brackney** (Charlottesville, Virginia), **Chris Magnus** (Tucson, Arizona), and **Abdul Pridgen** (Seaside, California), and former **Police Chiefs Jim Bueermann** (also former president of the National Police Foundation), **Chris Burbank, Brendan Cox, William Lansdowne, Norm Stamper, and Darrel Stephens** (also former president of the Major Cities Chiefs Association).

Read the full statement and see the list of signatories [here](#).

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