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EDITORIALS: Illinois--"Outlaw Death Penalty to Save Lives and Cash"

In a recent editorial, the *Chicago Sun-Times* supported the abolition of the death penalty in **Illinois** during the current legislative session. The paper noted its past support for capital punishment: "In the past, we've supported the death penalty as long as the legal system gives the accused a fair trial that results in a verdict of guilt beyond reasonable doubt. Sadly, in light of experiences in recent years, that goal seems unrealistic." Among the reasons for favoring abolition, the paper wrote that, "The death penalty is arbitrary - handed down in some cases but not in others with similar facts. Even with the best safeguards in place, it's unreliable, with irreversible consequences. And it's costly," consuming \$100 million in the past 7 years. As an alternative, the editorial noted that, "Like the death penalty, life without parole keeps heinous criminals off our streets, deters serious offenses and gives victims a sense that justice has been served." **Read full editorial below.**

November 8, 2010

Outlaw death penalty to save lives and cash

Starting next week, the state Legislature will have a chance to put an end to a long-running source of injustice -- the death penalty.

We've long supported the moratorium on the death penalty in Illinois and reforms designed to protect innocent people from execution.

But now there is an opportunity to abolish capital punishment in Illinois altogether. The state Legislature should jump on it.

Already, Illinois has had too many close brushes with wrongful executions. In recent years, a staggering 20 men sentenced to death have instead been freed.

Advocates of keeping the death penalty argue that new reforms make it virtually impossible to convict an innocent person in a capital case. We've heard it before and, if Illinois keeps the death penalty, we will hear it again after the next round of controversial cases.

In the past, we've supported the death penalty as long as the legal system gives the accused a fair trial that results in a verdict of guilt beyond reasonable doubt. Sadly, in light of experiences in recent years, that goal seems unrealistic.

Moreover, Illinois has spent an estimated \$100 million in the last seven years to pay for the prosecution and defense in death penalty cases. On top of that, according to the Illinois Capital Punishment Reform Study Committee report released last week, civil damages paid to men freed from Death Row have totaled \$64 million since 1977. It doesn't make sense to spend those dollars when a good alternative is available: life without possibility of parole.

Like the death penalty, life without parole keeps heinous criminals off our streets, deters serious offenses and gives victims a sense that justice has been served.

For the Legislature's upcoming veto session, the Illinois Coalition Against the Death Penalty is making a strong push for abolishing the death penalty and has lined up both Democratic and Republican sponsors. The effort also is supported by the Illinois State Bar Association.

Ten years ago, then-Gov. George Ryan commuted all existing death sentences to life in prison and placed a moratorium on further executions, saying he had lost confidence in the reliability of convictions in capital cases.

But that didn't abolish the death penalty, and any governor can overturn the moratorium at any time. Death Row now has 15 inmates who were sentenced after Ryan left office, and their cases are working through the appeals courts, which takes an average of 13 years.

The death penalty is arbitrary -- handed down in some cases but not in others with similar facts. Even with the best safeguards in place, it's unreliable, with irreversible consequences. And it's costly.

It's time capital punishment in Illinois comes to an end.

("Outlaw death penalty to save lives and cash," Chicago Sun-Times (editorial), November 8, 2010). See [Costs](#), [Life Without Parole](#), and [Arbitrariness](#).

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