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KANSAS
COALITION
AGAINST THE
DEATH
PENALTY



Kansas Coalition Against the Death Penalty

A 501(c)(3) organization | Spring 2013

Kansas Legislative Update: Abolition Bills Introduced in House and Senate

This year's legislative session brought with it some new challenges for KCADP and the abolition effort in Kansas. The major challenge this year was the large number of new legislators in Topeka, many with unknown positions on the death penalty. We knew, after the fall elections, that this would be the case.

Our team in Topeka visited with many legislators, and the conversations were both informative and productive. Many legislators did not know that having the death penalty costs taxpayers much more than having the maximum sentence be life in prison without parole. Others are concerned about innocence, the sanctity of life, and the risk of errors that is embedded in our justice system. We are hard at work to help inform legislators about the reasons Kansas would be better off without the death penalty.

In addition to meeting with legislators, two abolition bills were introduced into the Legislature. Both bills would replace the death penalty with a maximum sentence of life without the possibility of parole.

The House bill, HB 2397, also establishes a fund to help the families of murder victims and provide for mental health services by redirecting savings that will come from abolishing the death penalty. The Senate bill, SB 126, was introduced in February.

Representative Steven Becker, a freshman Republican from Buhler, led the effort to introduce the House bill. Becker is a former attorney and Reno County District Court judge. He strongly believes that the death penalty is not right for Kansas.



Representative Steven Becker of the 104th Kansas House district.

Unfortunately, now is not the right time to plan hearings or push for a vote. But there is still a lot you can do to help us get closer to abolition in Kansas.

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- Read the Executive Director and Board Chair Columns to find out more about the role you play in the Kansas strategy.
- Contact your legislators and tell them you support ending the death penalty.
- Attend one of our Upcoming Events in your area. Don't see an event in your area? Contact KCADP to schedule one!
- Recruit your family, friends and neighbors to the cause. Every voice can make a difference!

Maryland Legislature Votes to Repeal Death Penalty

On March 15th, the Maryland Legislature voted to repeal the state's death penalty. The repeal bill passed the Maryland House on a bipartisan vote of 82-56. The previous week, the State Senate passed the bill on a bipartisan 27-20 vote. All that's left is for Governor O'Malley to add his signature, making Maryland the 18th state without the death penalty!

This is a huge moment for abolition work, because it signals yet again that the death penalty is on its way out. Maryland is the sixth state in six years to end its death penalty, and the first south of the Mason Dixon Line.

Maryland's repeal comes after serious attempts to reform the death penalty system, including a moratorium on executions, two studies, and sweeping reforms in 2009 that made Maryland's death penalty one of the narrowest in the nation.

Maryland's 2009 reforms were designed to make the death penalty more accurate. But they found that the changes only made the law more complicated, costly, and arbitrary, while failing to fix the original reason for the reforms – the risk of executing an innocent person. It took four years after passing the reforms for lawmakers to throw up their hands and decide they were better off repealing the death penalty.

The lesson from Maryland is that there is no fixing the death penalty process. Maryland tried to reform the system. But in the end, they learned that the only way to fix the death penalty is to replace it.

Kansas faces the same problems that led Maryland to repeal the death penalty. In Kansas, four death sentences have been overturned due to various errors made during the trials. In a death penalty case, even a small mistake could risk the execution of an innocent person.

States across the country are moving away from the death penalty as more and more people learn that the system makes mistakes, is unevenly applied, and wastes millions of dollars while failing to make us safer. Kansas is no more immune to the major issues plaguing the death penalty than the 18 states that have chosen to repeal the death penalty before us.

*Congratulations to
Maryland Citizens
Against
State Executions
on their recent victory!*

**Want to help Kansas get
one step closer to abolition?**

DONATE TODAY!

Your donation will help cover the cost of materials like this newsletter and the great upcoming events you'll find on pages 4 and 5! Don't forget—all first-time contributions qualify for our 2 to 1 matching grant!

You can mail your contribution to KCADP using the form on the back of this newsletter. Or contribute online immediately by going to www.ksabolition.org/donate.

THANK YOU!

From the Executive Director...

By Mary Sloan



In the last newsletter, I wrote “what does the New Year hold?” One of the great things the year held was the abolition victory in Maryland!

As we cheer for Maryland, I know everyone is asking “Will Kansas be next?” Or if not the very next, when will our turn come?

There are a handful of other states, including Delaware and Colorado, that are pushing for repeal now. So we may or may not be the very next state to go. But we are going to make a big push for repeal in 2014.

What can we learn from the victory in Maryland? How does their strategy compare to ours?

Their strategy was the same in many respects – Maryland abolitionists made it clear that repealing the death penalty was a non-partisan issue. And they made sure that people knew the facts:

- The death penalty is not a deterrent.
- It does not keep the public safer.
- Is part of a flawed justice system that convicts the innocent despite efforts not to.
- It does not serve the families of victims.
- It costs more than a system where the maximum sentence is life without parole.

In Maryland, the families of homicide victims were key champions for repeal. They drove home the message that the death penalty ignores the real needs of victims’ families by pulling resources away from victims’ services and crime prevention.

The Maryland campaign made sure that becoming an abolition advocate was comfortable for people who had previously supported use of the death penalty. And when their legislative push began, everyone stood in solidarity with each other and with their Governor.

We have the same strategy in Kansas – we are the big tent organization. Abolition is a non-partisan issue. We welcome those who are new to the cause. We accept every reason for opposing the death penalty. We stand together.

You can learn more about our strategy in Kansas by watching our advocacy webinar. Go to <http://www.ksabolition.org/featured/watch-kcadps-advocacy-training-webinar> to view the recording and learn more about what it will take to win in Kansas.

Now to Kansas this year - you’ve already read about our two bills, HB 2397 and SB 126. When the time comes to vote on these bills, we will need 63 yes votes in the House and 21 in the Senate. With your help, we will have them.

So, we have the winning strategy. We are laying the groundwork. As our day approaches, we need you to advocate, communicate, recruit others and stand up for abolition!

From the Board Chair...

By Donna Schneweis

Maryland's successful legislative votes for abolition this year didn't happen in a vacuum. Their success was due to a comprehensive campaign where staff, Maryland Coalition Against State Executions members, and other abolition supporting groups worked together to achieve their goal.

Their success mirrors the experience of New Jersey, New Mexico, Illinois, and Connecticut. Abolition happens when the legislators get the message loud and clear that their constituents do not support executions.

Here in Kansas, the visits from the various lobbyists to the legislators are not enough. We need you, their constituents, to raise your voice in support of abolition! We need you to encourage your friends and neighbors and coworkers to do the same.

Many legislators are ready or leaning towards supporting a sensible, fiscally-responsible and common sense public policy of abolition. Your email, note or phone call will help them get there.

Whether the legislature is in session or not, it is vital that your Senator and Representative hear from you that abolition is the way to go.

If you aren't sure how to approach your legislators or want more facts to share, contact our staff at 785-235-2397 or info@ksabolition.org. They will be glad to assist you.

Together, we will educate, inform and advocate--and we will succeed. Abolition--it takes all of us!

Sister Helen Prejean to Speak in Wichita April 17th!



Sister Helen Prejean, longtime abolition advocate and author of *Dead Man Walking*, will speak in Wichita on April 17th. This event is sponsored by the Respect Life and Social Justice office of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita.

Sister Helen has been instrumental in sparking national dialogue on the death penalty and helping to shape the Catholic Church's newly vigorous opposition to state executions. She travels around the world giving talks about her ministry.

**Wednesday, April 17, 2013
Wichita State University's
Hughes Metropolitan Complex
5015 E. 29th St. North, Room 180
7:00-8:30 PM**

Use Entrance N (South) or D (East)
Other Entrances Will Not Be Open

Hosted by Holy Savior Catholic Church
Contacts: Christine Sementelli (316) 648-4086
Linda Pearce (316) 773-9089

Upcoming Events

Kirk Bloodsworth

We are honored to announce that Kirk Bloodsworth, the Advocacy Director at Witness to Innocence, will be speaking in Kansas in April!

Kirk was a key advocate in the Maryland repeal effort. A former Marine with no criminal record, Kirk was wrongfully sentenced to death in Maryland in 1985 for a crime he did not commit. After serving more than eight years in prison, including two on death row, Kirk was the first person on death row to be exonerated using DNA evidence after his conviction. He was officially pardoned in December 1993.



Kirk is a powerful spokesman for repealing the death penalty. We hope you will take the time to hear his story at one of the following events. For details on events, contact KCADP at 785-235-2237 or info@ksabolition.org.

Sunday, April 14th:

Grace United Methodist Church
11485 S. Ridgeview Road
Olathe, KS 66061
9:00-10:30 AM

A Matter of Innocence—An Evening with
Kirk Bloodsworth*
Dinner and Reception
St. David's Episcopal Church
3916 SW 17th St
Topeka, KS 66604
6:30-8:30 PM

Monday, April 15th:

University of Kansas
Student Union—Level 5, Big 12 Room
1301 Jayhawk Blvd
Lawrence, KS
7:00-8:30 PM

Tuesday, April 16th:

Newman University
Room: TBD
Wichita, KS
7:00-8:30 PM

Wednesday, April 17th:

Fort Hays State University
Room: TBD
Hays, KS
7:00-8:30 PM

**Tickets are required for this event. Single tickets are \$25. Sponsorship opportunities are also available. To purchase tickets or for more information on sponsorships, please contact Maria Cuevas at 785-235-2237 or maria@ksabolition.org. RSVP by April 8th, 2013.*

Annual Ceremony of Remembrance and Healing

The Annual Ceremony of Remembrance and Healing will be held on April 23rd in Topeka. The ceremony will feature music, a candle lighting and a reading of the names of murder victims. The ceremony will take place at the memorial tree planted by KCADP and Kansas Murder Victim Families for Reconciliation advocates on April 23, 1994. For additional information, please contact the KCADP office at 785-235-2237 or info@ksabolition.org.

Tuesday, April 23, 2013
Memorial Tree
1176 SW Warren Ave
Topeka, KS 66604
7:30 PM



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