

# Reducing death penalty costs

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Reducing Death Penalty Costs Delisa Richardson Missouri Western State University July 19, 2012 Abstract In this paper, I will be evaluating the death penalty in the United States and ways that costs can be cut to make it much more of a viable option. " Using conservative rough projections, the Commission estimates the annual costs of the present system \$137 million per year (California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, 2008). What does an individual death row inmate get for millions of tax payers' dollars you ask? This includes; housing, garments, meals, health care, mental care, pre-trial and trial, unlimited appeals and petitions. I think that the limit for appeals at the state level should be only 3 appeals and 2 at the federal level. If an inmate knew how many state and federal appeals they had before they were done, we wouldn't see a waste of appeals on frivolous things. This would cut legal costs and free up the courts dockets a little more by not allowing death row inmates to appeal over every little thing. Reducing Death Penalty Costs Although the total accumulated cost of the death penalty sentence does vary from state to state one thing can be said; it is extremely exorbitant. " Using conservative rough projections, the Commission estimates the annual costs of the present system \$137 million per year (California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, 2008). What does an individual death row inmate get for millions of tax payers' dollars you ask? This includes; housing, garments, meals, health care, mental care, pre-trial and trial, unlimited appeals and petitions. Why would a public defender object or his boss for this matter object to getting their bills paid by the tax payers'? There needs to be stricter legal and privilege guidelines for death row inmates and attorneys that defend them. If prison

systems would make stricter guidelines and regulations for death row inmates then costs would go down exponentially. There needs to be limitations on how many times a death row inmate can appeal and petition their case. I think that the limit for appeals at the state level should be only 3 appeals and 2 at the federal level. If an inmate knew how many state and federal appeals they had before they were done, we wouldn't see a waste of appeals on frivolous things. This would cut legal costs and free up the courts dockets a little more by not allowing death row inmates to appeal over every little thing. These continuing moves that are plaguing our legal system which has increased the average duration of their stay on death row. If the number of appeals is not a good solution then only allow appeals that are relative to their case in proving their innocence. Check out the chart and look at the increase in length of death row durations we have seen over the last three decades. [pic](Death Penalty Information Center, 2012). Another way to cut costs for death row inmates is to shorten the time in between sentencing and execution. By limiting the number of appeals a death row inmate is allowed will significantly shorten their wait to be executed. As the graph above shows, in 1984 there were only 74 months wait between sentencing and execution. In the years to follow, the length of time between sentencing and execution grew exponentially to 178 months in 2010. That is almost 15 years for an inmate to accrue legal fees through unlimited appeals that they do not have to pay for. The length of time that U. S. inmates spend on death row has gotten increasingly longer in recent years, and raises questions about the constitutionality of this added punishment (Death Penalty Information Center, 2012). When an individual is sentenced to a death

penalty sentence, they are automatically entitled to unlimited appeals and the tax payers are going to pay for this through taxes. The inmates have at their disposal almost unlimited resources on the tax payer's dime. In my opinion, if a death row inmate cannot prove their innocence after the allotted 3 state appeals and 2 federal appeals with the financial allotment of \$250,000, then the financial responsibility should fall to the inmate and/or their families. We, as citizens, should not be forced to have to pay for these murders to continue to take up the courts time with frivolous appeals. Food expenses also need to be seriously cut down. Death row inmates are eating much better than many of America's low income families who make minimum wage and are unable to buy food. The average household income in The United States is \$51,914 per year (U. S. Department of Commerce, 2012). These people are in prison, not a day spa. In Connecticut, the Department of Correction serves up three meals a day for the bargain-basement price of \$2.42 per inmate — roughly what a bag of fries and a Coke will cost you at McDonald's (Kauffman, 2012). I believe this is still more than these criminals deserve. Below is the link to see a sample menu of what the inmates are being fed at Connecticut Department of Corrections:

[http://courantblogs.](http://courantblogs.com/investigative-reporting/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Prison-Menu.pdf)

[com/investigative-reporting/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Prison-Menu. pdf.](http://courantblogs.com/investigative-reporting/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Prison-Menu.pdf)

Our children do not even get this good of quality of food in schools, why should the inmates. Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who is reputed to have cut food costs down to 40 cents a day with a strategy that, included serving green surplus bologna to inmates (Kauffman, 2012). Many people share Sheriff Arpaio's ideology or he wouldn't keep getting re-elected. The inmates

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should only get bologna sandwiches and water. They should make their own bread from scratch also to cut down the costs of buying sliced bread. If the inmates want any kind of fresh fruits and vegetables then they must work to earn the right to a garden. The inmates' families should be responsible for the costs of the seeds and paying for the water to use on the gardens. Death row inmates should also not be allowed to live in air conditioned facilities. Death row prisoners are served breakfast and dinner in their cells, can usually mingle with others in the outdoor exercise yards while eating their sack lunches, and have exclusive control over the television, CD player or other diversions in their cells (Williams, 2009). "Death row inmates probably have the most liberal telephone privileges of anyone in state custody," said Terry Thornton, spokeswoman for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, explaining that they need ready access to their attorneys and can often make calls from their cells over a phone that can be rolled along the cell-block (Williams, 2009). Those on death row are also allowed more personal property inside their cells, to accommodate their voluminous legal documents without infringing on the 6 cubic feet of snacks and entertainment devices allowed each prisoner, said Lt. Sam Robinson, spokesman for San Quentin (Williams, 2009). They lost that ability when they committed those crime in which caused them to be sentenced to death. They should not be allowed to play games, watch television, have personal radios/CD players, unlimited access to the telephone and the inmates and all calls should be recorded, and they should not be allowed contact visits in private, unlike inmates in other parts of the prison. American prisons should also stop providing free 24 hour health care to their inmates. Make the

families of the inmate pay for any services rendered, whether inmates see an on call doctor or go to the emergency room. There is no reason that working taxpayers' should have to foot yet another outrageous bill for inmates. The average cost of healthcare for a typical American family of four in an employer- sponsored health plan in 2012 is \$20, 728 (Wells Media Group, Inc., 2012). Death row inmates should not be allowed to receive free health care while hard working Americans are struggling to make ends meet with minimum wages and still trying to be able to afford healthcare for their families. How does this seem fair, you may wonder? Well, it is not where near the category of fair. " Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. The Act, which affects both state and federal prisoners, restricts review in federal courts by establishing tighter filing deadlines, limiting the opportunity for evidentiary hearings, and ordinarily allowing only a single habeas corpus filing in federal court. Proponents of the death penalty argue that this streamlining will speed up the death penalty process and significantly reduce its cost, although others fear that quicker, more limited federal review may increase the risk of executing innocent defendants" [(Bohm, 1999 and Schabas, 1997)]. In conclusion, if our prison systems would make stricter guidelines and regulations for death row inmates then costs would go down exponentially. There needs to be stricter legal and privilege guidelines for death row inmates and attorneys that defend them. If prison systems would make stricter guidelines and regulations for death row inmates then costs would go down exponentially. Another way to cut costs for death row inmates is to shorten the time in between sentencing and execution. By limiting the number of appeals a death row inmate is allowed

will significantly shorten their wait to be executed. And finally, death row inmates should have all of their luxuries that are not necessities to live. Death row inmates would pray for death to come quicker because there are the bare minimum. References U. S. Department of Commerce. (2012, July 07). State & county quickfacts-usa. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html> Williams, C. (2009, November 11). Death penalty is considered a boon by some california inmates. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/11/local/me-deathrow11> Death Penalty Information Center. (2012). Time on death row. Retrieved from <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/time-death-row> Kauffman, M. (2012, March 1). Stat of the week: What's it cost to feed an inmate for a day?. Retrieved from <http://courantblogs.com/investigative-reporting/stat-of-the-week-whats-it-cost-to-feed-an-inmate-for-a-day/> California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice. (2008, July 01). Death penalty cost. Retrieved from <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/death-penalty/us-death-penalty-facts/death-penalty-cost> Wells Media Group, Inc. (2012, May 15). Healthcare costs for insured american family top \$20k in 2012: Milliman. Retrieved from <http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/national/2012/05/15/247598.htm>