

Minute on Abolition of the Death Penalty
Akron Friends Meeting
Adopted April 16, 2023

As Quakers, we hold that there is that of God in every person. The death penalty is contrary to that belief. Putting fellow citizens to death is a denial of their right to life and is contrary to our legal tradition of prohibiting killing except in self-defense or the defense of a third party. The death penalty contradicts our deeply held beliefs. If we believe that taking a life is the most heinous of crimes, then how can it be permissible for the state to take a life? Some innocent persons have been executed. In Ohio, eleven death row prisoners have been exonerated and released.

Much research demonstrates that the death penalty is applied unequally. People of color and people unable to afford an effective defense are more likely to receive a death sentence than white defendants and those who can afford their own legal representation. The death penalty is more likely to be applied if the victim of the crime was white, suggesting greater social value of white members of society. The increasing use of facial recognition software, which has been shown to be more likely to misidentify people of color, may increase the risk of charging and convicting innocent persons, based on erroneous evidence.

Participation in executions causes physical and psychological harm to those who participate. Studies show that prison guards who participate in practice or real executions die from heart attack or stroke at a higher rate than other guards. The method of execution, currently lethal drug cocktail, does not always work as planned, sometimes yielding grotesque results, which are especially traumatic for those responsible for carrying them out.

The death penalty does not deter crime. It does not make our communities safer. The huge costs of prosecuting death penalty cases could be better used to increase community policing, clear unsolved cases, and support victims' families.

The United States is one of a very few First World countries that still use the death penalty. Other practitioners of the death penalty include China, Iran, Russia and Saudi Arabia, putting us in the dubious company of autocratic states. The European Union prohibits member states from maintaining the death penalty.

Quaker testimonies of equality, nonviolence, integrity and community call on us to go beyond words and good intentions. Therefore, we pledge to advocate for an end to Ohio's death penalty. We pledge to be visible and outspoken about our opposition to the death penalty. We pledge to hold death row prisoners as well as victims' families in the Light.