



# Virginia's Death Penalty

What are the facts?

## Innocent People May Die

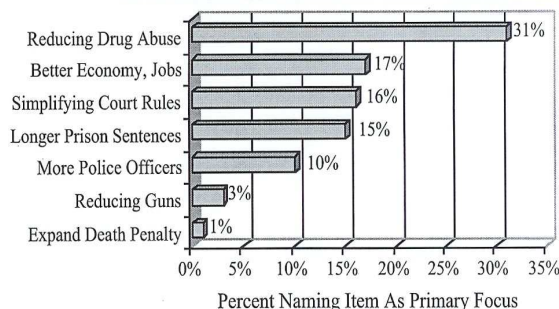
There have been **155 exonerations from death row** nationwide since 1973. Virginia came within days of executing Earl Washington Jr. before allowing DNA evidence to be examined which proved his innocence. The vast majority of capital cases have no biological evidence to test.

## It Does Not Deter Crime

A study of leading criminologists published in June 2009 in Northwestern University School of Law's *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* found:

- 88% of the country's top criminologists do not believe the death penalty acts as a deterrent to homicide.
- 87% percent of the expert criminologists believe that death penalty abolition would not have any significant effect on murder rates.
- 75% of the respondents agree that "debates about the death penalty distract Congress and state legislatures from focusing on real solutions to crime problems."

Police Chiefs Place Death Penalty Last in Reducing Violent Crime



A 1995 Hart Research Poll of police chiefs in the US put the death penalty last (at 1%) in identifying items that reduce violent crime.

## The Death Penalty Is Too Expensive

No cost study has yet been done in VIRGINIA. Those that have studied the cost found irrefutable data that **the death penalty costs taxpayers more than life imprisonment:**

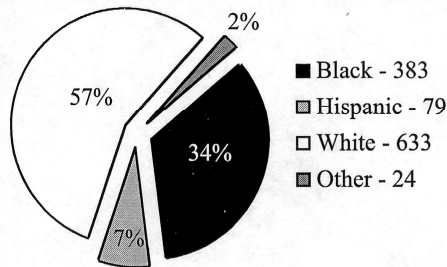
- In CALIFORNIA the current system costs **\$137 million per year**; it would cost **\$11.5 million** for a system without the death penalty. ([California Commission for the Fair Administration of Justice, July 2008](#))
- In KANSAS, the costs of capital cases are **70% more expensive** than comparable non-capital cases, including the costs of incarceration. (Kansas Performance Audit Report, December 2003)
- NORTH CAROLINA taxpayers spend **\$2.16 million per execution** over the costs of sentencing murderers to life imprisonment. (Duke University, May 1993)
- In FLORIDA **\$51 million per year** is spent above what it would cost to punish all 1<sup>st</sup>-degree murderers with life without parole. (Palm Beach Post, January 2000)
- In MARYLAND death penalty cases cost **3 times more** than non-death penalty cases, or \$3 million for a single case. ([Urban Institute, The Cost of the Death Penalty in Maryland, March 2008](#))

\* The greatest costs associated with the death penalty occur prior to and during trial, not in post-conviction proceedings. Even if all post-conviction proceedings (appeals) were abolished, the death penalty would *still be more expensive* than alternative sentences.

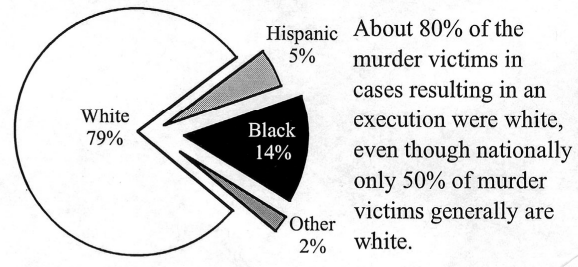
# Race Plays A Role

Researchers in Virginia found that a person is **over three times as likely to be sentenced to death when the victim is white** vs. when the victim is black (*Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission of Capital Punishment*). Among persons executed for interracial murders in the US, there were 15 executions with a white defendant & a black victim and 228 executions with a black defendant & white victim (*Death Penalty Information Center*).

**Race of Defendants Executed**



**Race of Victim in Death Penalty Cases**

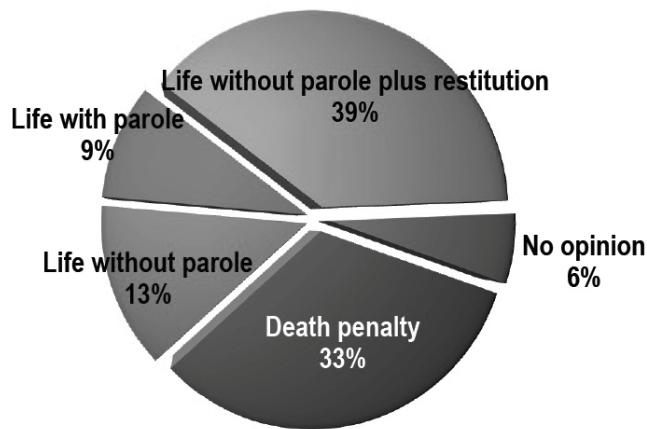


# Geography Determines Execution Rates

Since 1977, about **90% of all US executions have been carried out in the south**. With *110 persons* executed since 1982, Virginia is third behind Texas and Oklahoma in the number of people executed. In Virginia, murder convictions ending in the death penalty are twice as likely in suburban and rural jurisdictions as in urban jurisdictions.

# Public Opinion Favors The Alternative

**Support for Alternatives to the Death Penalty**



- A 2010 poll by Lake Research Partners found that a clear majority of voters (61%) would choose a punishment other than the death penalty for murder.

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