



# 2016 Annual Report

*Working for more than 25 years to  
end the death penalty through  
education, organizing and advocacy*



At the VADP 25th Anniversary Luncheon, Henderson Hill, Executive Director of The Eighth Amendment Project, discusses the role of Virginia in the national strategy to end the death penalty.

The Eighth Amendment Project coordinates the campaign to end the death penalty in the United States.

**Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty**

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# The Long Hard Road to Abolition

Dear VADP Supporter,

Those of us seeking to abolish the death penalty in the United States and here in Virginia face a changed world.

In many respects we have seen significant progress in the past year. Nationally, executions fell to a 25-year low, and new death sentences were down substantially. Fewer than half of Americans polled favor the death penalty, the lowest in four decades.



The number of states that still carry out executions has shrunk to a resolute few. New studies have revealed a small number of “outlier” counties that drive capital punishment — jurisdictions that charge, convict and sentence people to death in disproportionate numbers.

There were other encouraging signs.

The number of prisoners exonerated from death row continued to rise and now stands at 156. For every 11 executions since 1976, one individual has joined the ranks of the exonerated, proving with near certainty that innocent men and women have already met death.

A growing number of prosecutors, former judges and elected officials are going public with their opposition. There is a flood of news and opinion in various media outlets about capital punishment, most of it favorable for abolitionists like us.

But we do face strong headwinds. The recent election has generated an environment that seems decidedly unwelcoming to abolition.

Our new president has called for the execution of the Central Park Five despite their exoneration.

The president will soon fill one Supreme Court vacancy and possibly an additional two in the next four years. His new attorney general has a history of enthusiastically supporting state-sponsored killing.

In Virginia we may see three executions this year, though there have been no new death sentences in over five years. With the January 2017 execution of Ricky Gray, Virginia tied Oklahoma for second in number of executions (112) since 1976.

This is our current reality. Nevertheless, our goal is to have a serious death penalty abolition debate in the 2020 state legislative session. However, with a legislature that approved the electric chair as an execution method and a governor who blithely signs death warrants, it looks like a tough road to death penalty repeal. That is why we need increased support now and in the months ahead.

On page four of this report, you’ll find a message from VADP Executive Director Michael Stone, who provides more detail about our work and what you can do to help.

As you can see from the financial summary on page six, we run a tight ship. Only with your generous financial support and that of many others will we reach the shores of abolition.

Please know that we are deeply grateful for your support.

Sincerely,

Kent Willis  
VADP Board President

# Why We Contribute to VADP

## Linell Patterson, Rockingham

In 2001 I lost my Dad and step-mom to a brutal murder. I heard how the death penalty was being sought to bring justice to the victims' family. In reality, my sister and I had asked the prosecuting attorney to work towards life imprisonment.



To think that a person could be killed for me does not align with my belief system and is a burden I carry. The thought that another family would have to grieve this death for my justice is haunting.

The death penalty won't honor my dad and step-mom, or bring any sort of healing.

I donate to VADP because they're working hard to create a different sort of system - one that I believe would bring me more healing and peace.

## Michael Hash, Ruther Glen

I was falsely convicted of murder as a juvenile at the time of the crime, so I wasn't given the death penalty. But it could have easily gone a different way. The only hope that I had for 12 years as an innocent man in prison was that the truth would come out some day.



That is why I support VADP – because they are fighting for justice. How can there be justice with an irreversible penalty? Government doesn't always get it right; I'm living proof of that.

## Ewan Watt, Alexandria



My chief reason for opposing the death penalty is my concern with government coercion. I believe in limiting government power in all facets of public policy, including public safety.

I question the use of the death penalty as a form of punishment and deterrence that is carried out by people who are all too fallible.

## Jerry Givens, Richmond

As the executioner for the Virginia Department of Corrections, I killed 62 people over 17 years.



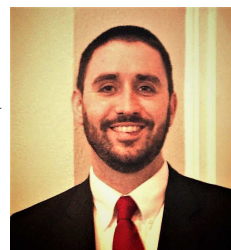
Some executions were hard. It made me think. If someone was innocent, I didn't want to be a part of that. So I started praying, "God, if I killed an innocent person, forgive me."

Virginia kills people. And what does that make us all? The executioner. I didn't enjoy killing and I wouldn't wish that burden on anybody.

I believe the death penalty is wrong. I support VADP because of their work to end it in Virginia.

## Rev. Marc Boswell, Louisiana

I support VADP because of my faith convictions about the immorality of the death penalty and the sanctity of human life. Since all humans are created in the image of God, I don't think that the state should have license to



end prematurely the life of any human being. I have found the advocacy and public witness of VADP to be greatly important work.

## Neva Herrington, Alexandria



I believe that the death penalty is a violation of human rights and poses the danger of killing an innocent person. As the mother of a murder victim, I oppose the taking of a human life to punish the loss of my daughter Elizabeth, murdered in Fredericksburg on November 4, 1994.

## Mixed Results in Virginia During 2016

Dear VADP Supporters,

Much like the national scene, Virginia had mixed results about the death penalty in 2016.

Last year the General Assembly passed legislation mandating use of the electric chair if lethal injection drugs were not available.

Instead of vetoing this bad bill, Gov. McAuliffe proposed using secret execution drugs from compounding pharmacies for Virginia executions.

There was significant opposition to Governor McAuliffe's execution drug secrecy proposal. The House of Delegates initially rejected it, but approved it after pressure from House leaders.

Our work on legislation to ban the execution of people with severe mental illness has resulted in new partnerships. Seven new mental health groups joined our coalition in 2016.



This coalition developed a sophisticated strategy that focused on key legislators with mixed voting records on death penalty-related issues, carried out legislator visits in their home districts, and won significant media support for our legislative goals.

Virginia had another year with no death sentences. It is now over five years since a jury sentenced someone to death in September 2011. And a jury in rural Dinwiddie county gave a life sentence for the killer of a Virginia state trooper in August.

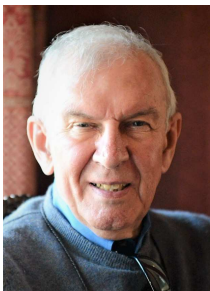
The recent execution of Ricky Gray and upcoming executions are remnants of old capital cases that today would likely result in life sentences.

It is indeed a new day for Virginia. We need you to continue responding to our action alerts, coming to regional meetings and education events, and making generous financial donations to our work.

— Michael Stone  
VADP Executive Director

## Why Board Members Support VADP

### Paul O'Shea, Fairfax



As death penalty abolitionists, we are working to save lives. The lives of those wrongly convicted on death row. The lives of those erroneously prosecuted, poorly represented, racially persecuted.

We work toward this end by our unending efforts at the state level

to reduce death sentences and executions.

One day our increasingly successful movement will happily cease the need to exist.

But before that inevitable day comes, there's enormous work to be done.

### Kristina Leslie, Annandale

As a capital defense attorney, I have witnessed the harm that capital punishment causes to clients and their loved ones. Victims rarely find closure as capital cases can span decades.

Inconsistencies in the law, racial prejudice, and geography all contribute to the basic unfairness of the death penalty.

It is an affront to our dignity and a violation of our most basic human rights. There is no just or decent way to impose death.

Together we can make a difference and abolish this outdated and inhumane practice.





# Accomplishments in 2016

## Public Policy Advocacy

- ◆ Worked with mental health organizations to support legislation that would ban executions of people with severe mental illness.
- ◆ Opposed a bill to make the electric chair the default execution method and a proposal from the governor for execution drug secrecy.
- ◆ Enlisted a Washington & Lee Law Professor to testify against the electric chair bill.
- ◆ VADP action alerts resulted in:
  - 281 e-mails to 76 legislators, asking them to vote against the electric chair bill.
  - 442 messages to Governor McAuliffe, urging him to veto the electric chair bill.
  - 290 e-mails to 90 legislators, asking them to oppose the execution drug secrecy proposal.



VADP supporters meet in Arlington during January.

## Media

- ◆ Made an appeal to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* editorial board that resulted in an editorial opposing the electric chair bill.
- ◆ Worked with partners to get op-eds opposing the electric chair bill published in the *Virginian Pilot* and the conservative *Bearing Drift* blog.
- ◆ Recruited a University of Richmond Law School Professor to write a *Richmond Times-Dispatch* op-ed on arguments against the governor's execution drug secrecy proposal.

- ◆ Helped to organize a press conference of faith leaders calling on legislators to oppose the governor's execution drug secrecy proposal.
- ◆ Worked to get op-eds supporting a bill to ban executions of people with severe mental illness in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and the Jefferson Institute for Public Policy e-newsletter.
- ◆ Worked with partners to design a website to support the ban on the execution of people with severe mental illness: <https://vasmie.org/>

## Public Education

- ◆ Worked with the American Bar Association and other partners to organize an education event on severe mental illness and the death penalty for legislators, prosecutors and media.
- ◆ Provided death penalty abolition speakers for a number of different audiences across the state:
  - University of Virginia Law School
  - Young Americans for Liberty at UVA
  - The Center-Right Coalition in Richmond
  - Episcopal clergy in Norfolk
  - Theophilus interfaith group in Tidewater
  - Talbot Park Baptist Church in Norfolk
  - St. Andrew Catholic Church in Roanoke

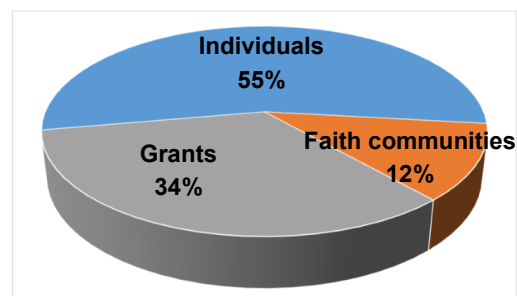
## Organizing

- ◆ Met with VADP supporters at five regional meetings in Northern Virginia, Richmond, Norfolk, Charlottesville, and Roanoke in both the spring and autumn.
- ◆ Worked with local leaders to host VADP “friend-raising” events in Herndon, Richmond, and Roanoke that produced new donors and identified potential board members.
- ◆ Hosted the VADP 25th Anniversary luncheon. 60 supporters saw the family of the late Janet Cowie Cook accept the *Citizen Advocate of the Year* award and Del. Marcus Simon get *Legislator of the Year* honors.

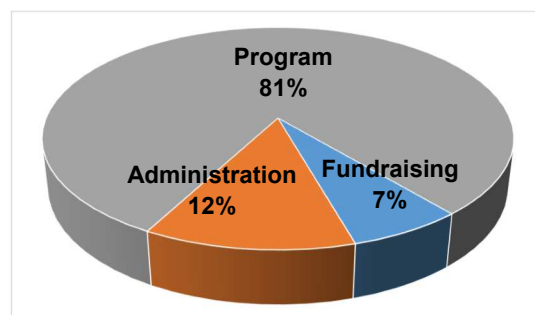
# VADP Finances

	2015	2016
<b>Income</b>		
Individuals	\$ 52,694.49	\$ 61,455.59
Faith communities	12,551.52	13,154.38
Grants	46,000.00	38,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 111,246.01</b>	<b>\$ 112,609.97</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Staff	\$ 58,386.07	\$ 59,000.36
Travel	5,738.18	5,442.22
Telephone	448.24	448.20
Postage and printing	569.19	725.06
Fundraising	7,413.86	6,770.45
Technology	5,148.24	5,512.94
Contract services	14,862.01	21,208.72
Miscellaneous	3,932.12	2,168.53
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 96,497.91</b>	<b>\$ 101,276.48</b>
<b>Net Income</b>		
	<b>\$ 14,748.10</b>	<b>\$ 11,333.49</b>

**Income: \$112,610**



**Expenses: \$101,276**



## VADP Board of Directors

<b>President</b> Kent Willis Mathews County	<b>At Large Members</b>	
<b>Vice President</b> Paul O'Shea Fairfax	RJ Bee	Washington
<b>Secretary</b> Mary Atwell Roanoke	Nicholas Cote	Alexandria
<b>Treasurer</b> Adam Northup Richmond	Emma Johnston	Lynchburg
	Kristina Leslie	Annandale
	Virginia Podboy	Richmond



*VADP board members at a January 2017 meeting in Ashland.*