

KANSAS COALITION AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY



KCADP is a 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION
Spring Newsletter 2015

From the Executive Director...



Here is a recap and update of where we are:

- HB 2129 was introduced by Rep. Steven Becker this session. It would repeal and replace the death penalty with a maximum sentence of life without parole.
- We held a Lobby Day in February. Members and supporters came to Topeka to visit with legislators and

urge them to support repeal. Thank you to all who attended!

- Faith Leaders from Kansas held a press conference at the Capitol to call for repeal of the death penalty. They made strong statements and presented legislators with the Faith Leader Sign On letter which had over 430 signatures from faith leaders across the state of Kansas.

Many thanks to The Right Reverend Bishop Dean E. Wolfe, Ninth Bishop of Kansas, the Reverend Len Dale, Director of Evangelism, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Central States Synod, The Reverend Kay Scarbrough, Topeka District Superintendent, Great Plains, United Methodist Church, The Reverend Peter Goerzen, Campus Pastor, Bethel College, and the Most Reverend, Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, Archbishop

of Kansas City in Kansas.

- Kansas Conservatives and two Exonerates also held a press conference to call for repeal. Thank you Rep. Bill Sutton, KCADP Board members Jill Craven and (former legislator) Anthony Brown, Laura Peredo, President of Ravens Respect Life at Benedictine College, and Exonerates Ron Keine and Ray Krone. They highlighted the fact that the death penalty is not compatible with the conservative values of fiscal responsibility, small government, or respect for life.

Bill Status

We have not been able to have a hearing despite numerous efforts to secure one. We have tried with three House Committees.

Why? Although we have even more House support than last year, efforts to sideline the bill have also succeeded this year (so far).

What now? However, the session is not over. Our bill is still safe in the House Appropriations Committee, where it is exempt from deadlines. We are continuing to work to bring it to a vote.

On the other bill of concern: We and our allies worked to prevent an "expedited appeals bill" (AKA *Kill 'Em Faster* or *Rush to the Needle*) from advancing and so far, so good.

What next? While we still have a way to go before the final gavel falls, we are all giving it everything we've got and our legislative supporters are "all in." I can't promise victory, but know this – we will not give up.

Celebrating the Life and Advocacy of Forrest Swall and Jamie Schwartz...

This year, KCADP lost two long-time friends: Forrest Swall and Jamie Schwartz. Both passed away this past year, and all of us on the KCADP team will miss their presence in our lives.

Forrest Swall was a founding member of the Coalition, representing the National Association of Social Workers in the initial meetings that led to the creation of the Coalition. Forrest's experience working with legislators was crucial for the nascent group.

He mentored the other founding members on how to effectively deal with elected officials and later served as a stalwart opponent to the death penalty as a state representative. He continued to be a strong advocate long after those founding days.

For those of us working in the eastern Kansas region, Forrest was a constant positive force and always someone we could count on to follow through when we asked for his help.

Jamie Schwartz served one term in the Kansas House of Representatives and was willing to stand in opposition to the death penalty. His time in elected office found him in the middle of a very hostile political climate where a strong stance against the death penalty was widely viewed as a sure way to end one's legislative career – but he held strong.

He showed the moral fortitude to do what is right, regardless of the cost. Jamie continued his advocacy against the death penalty

after his term in the Kansas House, becoming legislative liaison for Gov. John Carlin.

According to his wife, Dianne, "During and after his work in state government, Jamie encouraged dialogue in his church community, in his political party, and in his family about the morality of the death penalty and referred to it as state sanctioned murder." Jamie continued his anti-death penalty work by serving as the KCADP treasurer from 2007-2010.

Both of these advocates, our friends, will be greatly missed.

Conservatives and Evangelicals at Forefront of Efforts to End Death Penalty

Support across the political spectrum for ending the death penalty continues to grow both in Kansas and nationally. On March 17, KCADP and Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty co-sponsored an event at the Kansas Capitol featuring conservative legislators and grassroots leaders, as well as death row exonerees.

Their case was straightforward: the death penalty is at odds with core conservative values—a commitment to fiscal responsibility, limited government, and valuing life.

“There are millions of dollars spent on trials and appeals and we have nothing to show for it,” said Republican State Representative Bill Sutton. “There is absolutely zero utility for the tax dollars spent.”

Ray Krone and Ron Keine of Witness to Innocence, who were both sentenced to death and later found innocent, explained that they do not trust government with the power to execute. “The government almost killed me and dozens of other innocent individuals across the country who were wrongfully sentenced to death,” said Keine. “Kansas has an opportunity this year to ensure that the state never runs that risk.”



KCADP board member and former Republican State Representative Anthony Brown also spoke and pointed out how conservatives are changing debates over the death penalty in many states: “Because of this growing conservative support, red states like Kansas are considering ending the death penalty.”

And Kansas is not alone. A bill repealing the death penalty and replacing it with life without parole passed the Nebraska Judiciary Committee *unanimously* in March.

A headline from the Catholic magazine *America* perhaps best summed up this growing momentum: “Death Penalty Challenged

in US Heartland.”

Another important development came in March when the National Latino Evangelical Coalition – a leading organization of Latino evangelicals – unanimously passed a resolution calling for an end to the death penalty. An article appearing in the *Washington Post* called the vote groundbreaking, and a signal of changing views among evangelicals on the death penalty.

As these recent announcements make clear, the movement to end the death penalty is making important strides in becoming both stronger and more diverse.



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Catholic Voices..

Pope Francis unequivocally declared that the death penalty is “inadmissible, however serious the crime.” He stressed that justice can never be done by killing another human being.

The pope also stated that the use of the death penalty signifies “a failure” on the part of any state that practices it. In addition, more than 400 catholic and evangelical leaders signed a national statement, speaking out with “renewed urgency against the death penalty.”

They call governors, judges and prosecutors to end the death penalty, which the letter described as “practice that diminishes our humanity and con-

tributes to a culture of violence and retribution without restoration.”

The letter also noted, “it remains shameful reality that the United States is one of the few developed nations in the world that still executes its citizens.”

The signers of this letter include former presidents of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, social justice activist sister Helen Prejean, and Father Timothy P. Kesicki, S.J., head of all Jesuit priests in the U.S. and Canada.



From the Chair...

Courage, integrity, honesty. When you hear those words, who comes to mind for you?

For me, a whole collage starts forming. There are the men and women who were wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death. Innocence proven, they now bring to the public's awareness the stark reality of mistakes even in the life and death arena of capital trials.

The collage has former wardens and corrections officials who tell the truth about the cost of the death penalty vis a vis prison staff. They are shining a light into the toll of the death penalty extracted behind prison walls.

Next in my collage are the families of murder victims who been through the horrific loss of a loved one and who stand against capital punishment. They witness to a public policy choice that doesn't create another grieving family.

The religious, evangelical and conservative leaders who participated at the press conferences this year also show up in my collage. They are speaking in ever stronger terms calling on their members to choose abolition. It is a message sometimes not appreciated by their congregations or political colleagues, yet they aren't silenced.

Then there are the countless Kansans who have grappled with this issue. Whether a legislator who is really studying what the

death penalty does, or a voter who works to educate in their own community, each of them shows courage in stepping forward to deal with it.

The death penalty thrives in conditions of secrecy, silencing, denial. We saw that in the post 1994 years as some legislators were afraid to deal with it. They wanted it to "go away" as an issue.

The climate is significantly different today. Thanks to the courage and honesty of Kansans like Jamie Schwartz, Forrest Swall and many others, more and more Kansas politicians are willing to step forward and struggle with the issue. Your emails, letters, phone calls and conversations are making a difference.

Keep shining the light on the reality of the death penalty. Your actions may just be what is needed to get us over the top to abolition!



Volunteer Spotlight..

Members of the faith community in the greater Wichita area have been engaged in supporting repeal of the death penalty. In this section, we would like to highlight two of our activists from this area.



Dianna Carter

Dianna is the moderator for McPherson United Church of Christ. She is a vocal social justice and human rights activist. Dianna is "all in" for abolition. She has made great contributions during the 2015 legislative session by reaching out to her state legislators and by urging others to do the same.

She also invited one of our murder victim family members, Kristi Smith to speak at the McPherson United Church of Christ. Dianna puts serious effort into attending and participating in educational and lobbying events relating to the death penalty. She has a strong commitment and devotion to seeing the end of death penalty in the state of Kansas, which she proudly calls home.

Maryon Habtemariam

Maryon is a member of the Peace and Social Justice Committee at Holy Savior Catholic Church in Wichita.

After attending a speaking event that took place in Wichita, she got fully on board and took the initiative to introduce our cause to her church. Maryon also participated in a workshop organized by KCADP's Writers' and Speakers' Bureau, and became a member of the Bureau.

She then not only contacted her legislators and spread the word about abolition, but also took the personal initiative to organize a letter writing event at her church. As a proud native Kansan, Maryon has been doing her best to make the death penalty part of the past in Kansas.

Strong activists and volunteers like Dianna and Maryon show us that together we can put an end to the death penalty in Kansas.

They know that their participation and advocacy matters! You can do what they have been doing – make yourself familiar with the facts about the death penalty, and then pass the word to your friends, family, and colleagues. If you do, you could help change somebody's mind and heart.



We know that much of the challenge around repeal of the death penalty is that the public and legislators lack awareness of the issues and facts. Join Dianna and Maryon and become more informed and pass it on!

Thank you Dianna and Maryon!



PO Box 2065 | Topeka KS 66601 | 785.235.2237
info@ksabolition.org | www.ksabolition.org

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Your Contribution Makes A Difference!

Dear Friends,

What a legislative session! – But it is not over yet!

And our work is not over – we have until the final gavel drops. We are determined to bring HB 2129 to a vote.

We need your moral support, prayers, advocacy – and financial support. Your contribution to KCADP is vital to repeal efforts.

- A contribution of \$50 or more can help cover the printing costs of our *Exoneree Booklet* that is in the final design phases. We want to put it in the hands of the media, legislators and the public – and soon.

- A contribution of \$75 can help us pay the costs of an exoneree speaking engagement.
- A contribution of \$100, \$200 or more will help us put the *Murder Victim Family booklet* (the electronic version is on our website now) in the hands of those who need to know these compelling stories.

Your contributions continue to support our all-out efforts. Thank you in advance for your help. I know we can count on you.

Mary V. Sloan, MPA
Executive Director



A few of our legislative allies receiving a letter signed by over 430 Kansas faith leaders, calling for repeal of the death penalty.