






WHAT DOES THE DEATH PENALTY COST KANSAS TAXPAYERS?

More states are questioning the death penalty due to its high cost. Because of extra preparation and a separate sentencing phase required in capital cases, lengthier appeals, and the added costs of incarcerating death row inmates, studies consistently find the death penalty to be more costly than life without parole. Kansas is no exception: the state has spent millions of dollars on the death penalty since reinstating it in 1994.

Study after Study, Death Penalty Costs More than Life without Parole




Several studies have looked at the cost of Kansas' death penalty since its reinstatement in 1994. These studies' findings are consistent: a death sentence costs more than the alternative of life in prison without parole.

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1994 Fiscal Note estimated that, when Kansas reinstated the death penalty, it would cost the state an extra \$2.4 - 4.2 million a year.
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2003 Legislative Post Audit found that capital cases ending in a death sentence cost over their lifetime 70% more (\$1.2 million v. \$740,000) than similar cases in which the death penalty was not sought.
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2014 Judicial Council Study found that defense and district court costs are 3-4 times higher for trials where the death penalty is sought than for trials in similar cases where it is not sought.



Death Penalty's Impact on Local Communities

Beyond its impact on the state budget, the death penalty is a burden on local county budgets. Expensive capital cases can lead to unexpected costs and even tax increases.

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Cost to Osage County: In 2011, the county raised property taxes by two mills to pay for the costs of Kraig Kahler's capital trial and planned courtroom improvements (the trial's final price tag was \$141,370).
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Cost to Labette County: For the prosecution of David Bennett, the Kansas Attorney General's office recommended that the county set aside \$150,000 for the trial in 2015, with the costs to the county likely to grow to \$350,000-500,000.
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Cost to Franklin County: In advance of the capital trial of Kyle Flack, the county set aside \$100,000 in its 2015 county budget for the costs of court proceedings.

TIME IS MONEY

Capital cases set in motion a lengthy process that inflicts recurring cost on the state. Beyond fiscal costs, capital cases force lawyers and judicial employees to dedicate inordinate time to a handful of cases. These opportunity costs can be significant. Capital trials on average are over twice as long as trials in similar cases where the death penalty is not sought (40.13 v. 16.79 days). Kansas Supreme Court Justices estimate they spend five times more hours - and 20 times more when writing the opinion - on death penalty cases.

16.79 DAYS

When the death penalty is NOT sought.

40.13 DAYS

When the death penalty IS sought.

IMPACT ON KANSAS' INDIGENT DEFENSE SYSTEM

- The Kansas public defender system handles 84% of all adult felony cases filed in Kansas. The public defense system is projected to handle 27,110 cases in FY 2024. There currently are 33 capital cases which represent 0.12% of SBIDS' caseload.
- The FY 2025 budget for Kansas' public defense system is \$56.7 million. Capital case cost is projected at 5.23 million which would be 9.2% of the budget for cases comprising less than 0.15% of the caseload.

PLEA DEALS IN CAPITAL CASES DO NOT SAVE MONEY

Some say the death penalty is cost-effective, arguing that it saves money through plea deals. But the data suggest otherwise. In Kansas, defense and district court costs for capital cases ending in a plea deal are still higher than for similar cases going to trial where the death penalty is not sought (\$146,858 v. \$120,517). It is also important to remember that some death penalty cases go to trial, incur the high costs of a capital trial, yet result in life without parole, either after a jury chooses that sentence or a death sentence is overturned. In these cases, capital trials represent a much more costly path for obtaining a life parole sentence.

