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Contact: Larry Akey, Director of Communications, (202)580-6922 [o] or (202)580-9313 [c]
lakey@constitutionproject.org

Public Safety Officials to Speak Out on Death Penalty Concerns

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Current and former law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and corrections officials from around the country have come together to share their concerns about the administration of the death penalty in America and to help policymakers explore alternatives to it.

"Law enforcement officers, prosecutors and corrections officials are some of the people most familiar with the way the death penalty is carried out, yet our voices are not often heard in the discussions about it. Problems with capital punishment are increasingly on the public's mind, and we want to make sure our unique perspective is heard and considered," said Mark Earley, one of the co-chairs of [Public Safety Officials on the Death Penalty](#).

Earley oversaw 36 executions while serving as Attorney General for the Commonwealth of Virginia from 1998 to 2001. He was president of Prison Fellowship, a prominent national organization dedicated to ministering to prison inmates and their families, from 2002 to 2011.

While each member of the group has their own concerns about the death penalty, most are apprehensive about the prospect of [executing an innocent person](#).

"We have seen firsthand that the criminal justice system, like every other human endeavor, can make mistakes. Executing even one innocent person is one too many," said Kathleen Dennehy, another of the group's co-chairs. "And, as career public safety officials and professionals, we know that when the innocent are wrongfully convicted and executed, the guilty go free," she added.

She pointed to a report released earlier in the month by the National Registry of Exonerations showing that a record 149 people were exonerated in the United States in 2015 -- including five from death row.

Dennehy served for more than 30 years in the Massachusetts Department of Correction, rising through the ranks from Records Manager at MCI-Walpole to serve as Superintendent of MCI-Framingham and then Commissioner of the Department of Correction from 2004 to 2007 under then-Governor Mitt Romney.

Members of the group are also concerned about the [costs](#) of administering capital punishment, said

the third co-chair, Gerald Galloway.

"A common misconception is that the death penalty is less expensive than alternative punishments, such as life without parole. In fact, evidence shows that the death penalty is more expensive across the board by almost any measure. Many of us are concerned that capital punishment is diverting scarce resources away from other pressing public safety needs," Galloway said.

Galloway capped more than 30 years in law enforcement by serving as the chief of police in Southern Pines, North Carolina from 1988 to 2005. He has also served as an interim chief in Angier and Washington, North Carolina, and was president of the North Carolina Chiefs of Police Association.

The organization's website lists [disparities](#) in the application of capital punishment along racial, gender, and geographic lines and the impact of protracted appeals on [victims' families](#) as other areas of concern.

PSODP does not take a stand on the ultimate appropriateness of capital punishment.

"Some of us in the group support the death penalty under certain circumstances, while others are categorically opposed to it," said Cedric Alexander, "but all of us recognize that there are problems with the way it is currently administered in the jurisdictions that continue to employ it."

Alexander is the Chief Administrator of the DeKalb County, Georgia Department of Public Safety, where he has served since 2013, and a past president of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives.

Earley said the group will be speaking out around the country, before policymakers, the press, and the public -- especially in those states where reforms or even repeal of the death penalty are being debated. Members will also be reaching out to share their views on the death penalty with others in the law enforcement and public safety communities.

Public Safety Officials on the Death Penalty is an independent initiative of [The Constitution Project](#), a Washington DC-based legal watchdog that is providing organizational and logistical support to the group.

A [full list](#) of [members](#) and a [statement of principles](#) are available at [psodp.org](#).

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[About The Constitution Project](#)

Created out of the belief that we must cast aside the labels that divide us in order to keep our democracy strong, The Constitution Project brings together policy experts and legal practitioners from across the political spectrum to foster consensus-based solutions to the most difficult constitutional challenges of our time through scholarship, advocacy, policy reform and public education initiatives. Established in 1997, TCP is based in Washington, D.C.