

Nebraska  
Conservatives  
Concerned

About the  
Death Penalty

A Project of NADP

## The 'Closure' Myth: How the Death Penalty Fails Victims' Families

Capital punishment prolongs pain for victims' families, dragging them through an agonizing and lengthy process that holds out the promise of an execution at the beginning but often results in a different sentence. A life without parole sentence begins as soon as victims' families leave the courtroom and is served anonymously, outside the spotlight of the media.

"When Michael Ryan was sentenced to death, we were sentenced too...For 25 years it has been all about Michael Ryan. He is all my family and I ever hear about. Jim is never mentioned. Only the continued talk about what Ryan deserves and not what my family and me *needs*. Every appeal, on and on. Reading the horrible details again in the news, year after year. Even after the execution, if it ever comes, it will be another day about Michael Ryan, and nothing about Jim."

*Miriam Thimm Kelle, whose brother James was murdered by death row inmate Michael Ryan  
Testimony before the Nebraska Judiciary Committee, March, 2013*

"The existence of the death penalty...perpetuates a cruel illusion that they [murder victim families] may have vengeance, when in reality the system requires years of appeals, repeatedly putting the victims through the nightmare of their loved one's death...My firsthand experience working with victims is that they simply want to be done with their tragedy."

*Brent M. Bloom, former chief deputy Douglas County Prosecutor  
Testimony to the Nebraska Judiciary Committee, January 29, 2009*

"You hear the term 'closure' as far as the satisfaction or the end of the case, but I don't know that people necessarily get closure from the criminal justice system because the process continues for quite some time."

*Don Kleine, Chief Prosecutor, Douglas County, Nebraska  
Testimony before the Nebraska Judiciary Committee, January 29, 2009*

## **Diverting Scarce Resources**

The death penalty's cumbersome and expensive process diverts millions of dollars and attention from the critical services that homicide survivors need to help them heal, including specialized grief counseling, financial assistance, and ongoing support. In most states, these services are sorely lacking.

"A new national report ranks Nebraska as the "stingiest" state in the nation when it comes to helping crime victims pay expenses. The report, released Monday, said the state paid an average of \$26 each to help crime victims and survivors with funeral costs, medical costs, counseling and lost wages in 2012. That's less than half the amount paid by the next-lowest state, Louisiana, and many times less than the \$763 average paid by neighboring Iowa."

*"Nebraska 'Stingiest'? State keeps tight wallet when compensating crime victims, new report says." Omaha World Herald. June 17, 2014*

### **Just the Facts:**

- ◆ In Nebraska, it takes an average of almost 16 years from the time of an original death sentence to an execution. Several Nebraska victims' families have agonized through over 25 years of appeals and re-trials, waiting for a final outcome in their loved ones cases.
- ◆ The death penalty is irreversible. The process is longer because a life is on the line. The extra procedures are legally and constitutionally required to reduce the risk of mistakes. And even these safeguards are not enough – at least 150 people have been exonerated from death row after waiting years or decades for the truth to come out. Streamlining the process would virtually guarantee the execution of an innocent person.