



California's Death Penalty System "Dysfunctional"

Written for the web by Posted By: Marcey Brightwell, Reporter

An independent state commission calls California's death penalty system "dysfunctional" and is recommending the state nearly double the amount of money it spends on the death penalty process to help speed up executions.

The California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice issued its 117 page report Monday, suggesting the state spend another \$95 million dollars a year to help reduce "excessive" delays and ease the backlog of old cases. That would bring the yearly amount spent on death penalty cases to more than \$232 million.

California has the largest death row in America with 673 inmates currently awaiting execution.

Condemned inmates spend more time on California's death row than any other state. California prisoners wait an average of 17 years before being executed, the national average is 12 years.

Much of the delay is caused by a lack of adequate counsel. Most inmates sentenced to death row wait years before being appointed a qualified attorney. The commission recommends the state hire more trained lawyers to help speed up the process.

California Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald M. George says if nothing is done to improve the system, the backlogs will grow "until the system fails of its own weight."

The report says corrections are needed because failures in the system create "cynicism and disrespect for the rule of law and "weaken any possible deterrent benefits of capital punishment."

The commission also said the time is right for California voters to consider "rational" alternatives to current death penalty laws.

The commission did not recommend specific alternatives but said replacing the current system with a narrower death penalty law or replacing capitol punishment with lifetime incarceration could be considered potential options.

The Commission's report is the first comprehensive review of the state's death penalty since the law was legislatively enacted in 1977.

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