



Shephnen Rohde and John Van de Kamp

Experts find death penalty 'dysfunctional'

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With a cost to taxpayers of well over \$100 million per year and most cases stretching out for more than two decades, California's capital punishment system has become "dysfunctional," according to a report released Monday by the state's Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice.

Chaired by Pasadena resident and former state Attorney General John Van de Kamp, the body also found that the state would have to commit an additional \$95 million per year in order to "fix" administration of the death penalty.

Suggested reforms include increasing defendants' access to qualified public defenders, changing some court procedures and increasing staffing for the state Attorney General's Office.

"What it's essentially saying is if you don't do these reforms you should look to [death penalty] alternatives," said Van de Kamp, who is quick to point out that the report was not intended to support or oppose capital punishment, but to determine what must be done to properly carry out death sentences.

Nonetheless, a number of commission members offered their opinions in addenda to the report, including Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton, a supporter of capital punishment who advocates reform.

Civil rights attorney and capital punishment opponent Stephen Rohde, who was not a member of the commission, praised the report as an objective and thorough assessment.

"It supports what opponents have been saying for decades: that the system is broken, that it would take tremendous resources and taxpayer money to fix it, and that we as a society have to make a judgment whether those resources can be used elsewhere," he said.

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