

# Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty

**Yes!** *I want to help keep the death penalty  
out of Massachusetts.*

Please send me information about the death penalty.

I would like to distribute copies of this brochure.

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies.

(Or, feel free to make your own copies.)

and, I would like to join MCADP.

General Membership \$40 [ New  Renewal]

\$60 Household,  \$30 Student/Fixed Income

Additional donation:

\$50  \$100  \$250  \$500  Other

Amount Enclosed\*: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Donations are not tax deductible.*

Make checks payable to MCADP and mail to address below:

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email \_\_\_\_\_

03/06

Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty, Inc.

PO Box 51920 • Boston, MA 02205  
617-523-3951 • mcadp@earthlink.net  
www.mcadp.org

## Please Join Us!

On November 6, 1997 the death penalty was defeated by a tie vote in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Since that time, new bills to reinstate the death penalty have been introduced in every legislative session. Though these bills have all been defeated, each defeat has been achieved only through extraordinarily hard work by a large number of people. The continuation of this work requires the participation of every person in Massachusetts who opposes the death penalty. Without your help and continued vigilance, the death penalty *will be reinstated.*

**When you join MCADP you become a  
member of the oldest active anti-death  
penalty organization in the United States.**

Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty is the only statewide organization solely dedicated to fighting against the death penalty in Massachusetts. Founded in 1928 and first known as the Massachusetts Council for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, MCADP:

- seeks to persuade legislators and candidates to vote against capital punishment;
- provides information to elected officials and candidates opposed to reinstatement;
- educates the public through conferences and workshops, television and radio appearances, and press reports.

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## Help Keep the Death Penalty Out of Massachusetts



*Detail of Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco from the cartoon of a mural  
by Ben Shahn. © Estate of Ben Shahn, licensed by VAGA, NY, NY.*

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# It's Easy to Believe in the Death Penalty—If You Don't Know the Facts

## ***Fact 1: The death penalty does not deter crime.***

The most knowledgeable death penalty proponents, for example, Professor Ernest van den Haag, agree. Crime statistics demonstrate that death penalty states do not have lower rates of homicide than non-death penalty states. Massachusetts has had the lowest murder rate of the industrial states for years. Its murder rate is lower than that of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut, all having the death penalty. Southern states, which carry out executions most frequently, have higher per capita homicide rates.

Police and prison officials are no safer in states with the death penalty than in those without it. Research has shown that implementation of the death penalty produces a 'brutalizing effect.' Homicides increase, in fact, in the month following an execution.

## ***Fact 2: Innocent people are executed.***

Since the death penalty was reinstated by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1976, more than 95 people originally sentenced to death have been released from prison as of December, 2003 because evidence of their innocence emerged. The current emphasis on faster executions, fewer resources for the defense, and an expansion in both the charging of capital crimes and the number of death cases means that the execution of innocent people is inevitable.

In Massachusetts at least 18 people have been wrongly convicted of capital crimes since 1900; three of them were executed. Lawyer Johnson, first convicted of murder in 1971 and twice sentenced to death by all-white juries, was released in 1982 after a previously silent eyewitness came forward and identified the state's chief witness as the actual killer.

Widely heralded DNA evidence is not a factor in most cases. When it is, it is often the subject of human error in its gathering, handling, and/or testing. Moreover, DNA evidence does not answer questions about self-defense, premeditation, etc.

## ***Fact 3: The death penalty is arbitrary and discriminatory.***

Approximately 250 people who are sentenced to death in the USA each year are not those whose crimes are the most

atrocious. Instead, they are poor, people of color, and those whose victims are white. More than 90% of inmates on death row had court-appointed attorneys.

A September, 2000 Justice Department survey of the federal death penalty discovered major racial and geographical disparities. The report showed that 80% of the defendants submitted by federal prosecutors for death penalty review were minorities, and 40% of the 682 cases came from only five jurisdictions. In North Carolina, an April, 2001 study, the most comprehensive ever, examined 502 cases between 1993 to 1997 and showed that defendants whose victims were white were 3.5 times more likely to be sentenced to death than defendants whose victims were non-white. Similar results have been reached in many previous studies.

Even though the Commonwealth of Massachusetts currently rejects the death penalty, the federal government can impose it. Recently, the US Attorney General stepped up efforts to import capital punishment into our state by preempting the Commonwealth's right to prosecute common crime and prosecuting such crimes under federal jurisdiction solely because he wishes to impose a death penalty here. Such efforts not only trample on our rights as citizens of Massachusetts, but they also serve to render use of the death penalty even more arbitrary nationwide because similar crimes are likely to be punished unevenly depending expressly on whether the state or federal government prosecutes.

## ***Fact 4: Every western democracy except the United States has abolished the death penalty.***

The USA is one of the few democratic and industrialized countries that still executes people. In 2002, Amnesty International found that 81% of known executions in the world occurred in China, Iran, and the US.

Almost all European countries have stopped using the death penalty. By law and practice, many US allies will not extradite accused murderers to the US unless guarantees are issued that the death penalty will neither be sought nor imposed. Since 1990, Amnesty International found that only seven countries are known to execute juveniles: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the

US. Between 1990 and September 2003, the US has executed more juveniles (17) than any other country in the world.

## ***Fact 5: Public opinion favors life imprisonment without parole.***

Polls consistently reveal that the majority of respondents prefer life imprisonment without parole to the death penalty. In Massachusetts, 67% of the respondents to a 1994 survey preferred life imprisonment without parole for first-degree murderers when accompanied by restitution to the victim's family.

Nationwide polls show that support for the death penalty is declining precipitously. A majority of respondents continue to prefer both life imprisonment without parole and a moratorium on executions until flaws in the criminal justice system are eliminated.

In today's world, the death penalty is unnecessary as a tool to protect society. Prisons are secure and Massachusetts' mandatory sentence of life imprisonment without parole actually means 'life in prison.'

## ***Fact 6: Most of the religious community opposes the death penalty.***

Leaders of most religious denominations oppose the death penalty, believing that state-sanctioned killing diminishes us all. An 'eye for an eye,' King Hammurabi's code (1780 BC) was written when secure prisons did not exist and was, in fact, intended to limit, not mandate, proportionate punishment. Indeed, the concept has never been used to justify legal punishment in the US other than where death is a possible penalty.

## ***Fact 7: It costs more to have the death penalty, thereby draining resources from real crime-fighting measures.***

Because of the enormous costs associated with the prosecution and defense of a death penalty case, including costs for bifurcated trials with a separate penalty phase and subsequent appeals, studies have proven that it is far more expensive to impose a death sentence penalty than it is to impose a prison sentence for life.

# The Facts are Clear

The death penalty is not a deterrent.

Innocent people will be executed.

The death penalty is imposed unfairly — most often upon the poor and people of color.

The United States is the ONLY western democracy that maintains the death penalty.

The death penalty is simply not necessary.

The implementation of state-sanctioned killing diminishes us all.

## Take Action!

1. Tell your state and local legislators where you stand.
2. Support those candidates who oppose the death penalty.
3. Educate others. (Speakers are available to address local groups.)
4. Become a member of MCADP and encourage your friends to join.