



Maryland's Death Penalty Impact on Victims

“In my 15 years as a victims rights lawyer, I have represented many murder victim families in death penalty cases, and the additional anguish caused by the justice process is overwhelming. When I first see a client, I silently pray the prosecutor will decide against pursuing the death penalty, but not because I am against that form of punishment. My prayers are for the victims and the hope they will be spared the pain, isolation and despair the death penalty process will inevitably bring.”

— RICHARD POMPELIO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW JERSEY CRIME VICTIMS' LAW CENTER
AND NATIONAL VICTIMS' RIGHTS ADVOCATE

RICHARD'S SON, TONY, WAS MURDERED AT AGE 17

- Many murder victims' families do not support the death penalty. Some oppose it in principle, while others feel the cumbersome and lengthy system is harmful to them.
- To be meaningful, justice should be swift and sure. The death penalty is neither. Capital punishment prolongs pain for victims' families, dragging them through an agonizing and lengthy process that holds out the promise of one punishment in the beginning and usually results in a life sentence in the end anyway.
- A life without parole sentence begins immediately — as soon as victims' families leave the courtroom instead of leaving them in limbo for years — and is served anonymously, outside the spotlight of news cameras and public scrutiny.
- The death penalty can split families apart, forcing relatives with different perspectives on the issue to engage in a polarizing debate at the time when they most need each other's support.
- By arbitrarily selecting a handful of defendants for death, capital punishment creates a hierarchy of victims — sending a message that some victims' lives are worth more than others. In MARYLAND, such disparity is even racially biased, with white victim cases twice as likely to receive a death sentence even though about 80% of our state's homicide victims are black.
- The death penalty diverts resources that could be used to provide services to homicide survivors to help them heal — including more compensation, increased access to grief counseling, scholarships for orphaned children, professional leave to attend court proceedings, and ongoing support.

“Losing a beloved family member to murder is a tragedy of unimaginable proportions. The common assumption is that family members who have suffered this kind of loss need the death penalty for justice or healing. That assumption is false and harmful.”

— VICKI SCHIEBER, CHEVY CHASE, MD

VICKI'S 23-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER,
SHANNON, WAS MURDERED IN 1998.