



NAACP Maryland State Conference
P.O. Box 67747

Baltimore, Maryland 21215
Death Penalty Commission Hearing
July 28, 2008

I am Elbridge James, and I am here on behalf of Maryland State NAACP President Gerald Stansbury and our members to express our opposition to the use of the death penalty. The NAACP is very happy to see that this commission is seriously addressing the issue of the death penalty, especially in regard to how race and poverty mire its application.

The NAACP, at the national and state level, has long been in opposition to the use of the death penalty in our state and across the country. We argue that a system run by the emotions of human beings is never perfect and reflects the problems in the broader society. We know painfully well that socio-economic status, race and ethnicity continue to affect the decisions which human beings make. Frankly, Mr. Paternoster's study in 2003 confirmed the bias that we had long seen and experienced.

However, our argument goes beyond whom is being executed, to the fundamental premise justifying the validity supporting the existence of state sponsored executions; that these executions are a deterrent necessary to preserving life and maintaining an orderly society. In modern society there is no evidence showing the validity of either premise. In addition, the cost associated with defending its use and correctly satisfying due process drains resources from programs and projects that would provide greater societal safeguards and opportunities.

To that end, it is probably not surprising that we have seen a significant shift among black voters regarding their views on the death penalty. Polling, since 2005, shows that a majority now opposes the death penalty and two-thirds support replacing death with a sentence of life without the possibility of parole.

Our hope is that this Commission will not argue over the how and why of such racial disparities in death sentencing. African Americans in the state of Maryland already know that the death penalty is not applied equally. What we seek is a shifting of fiscal priorities to programs that support the investment in depressed and trouble communities to enrich the lives of our youth and disadvantaged.

The death penalty is a bankrupt policy that wastes increasingly scarce state and federal resources. Our state desperately needs to invest more in caring for those traumatized by violence, particularly youth, if we are ever going to break the cycle of violence in of our communities.

Our tax dollars would be much more effectively invested in education, mental and physical health care, childcare – and other essential ingredients of opportunity, equality and public safety.

The NAACP has been and remains committed to eliminating discrimination in our society, especially our public institutions. Even if Maryland repeals the death penalty tomorrow, our work is clearly not done. However, we are asking you to lay a foundation for the fuller realization of the promise carved over the US Supreme Court, of “equal justice under law.” Replace the death penalty with life without parole.

For Gerald Stansbury, President of the State NAACP and its members.

Thank You