

DEATH PENALTY REPORT

Committee on Revision of the Penal Code



- 03 Executive Summary
- 05 Recommendations
- 08 Introduction and Background
- 34 Information about the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code
- 37 Appendix of Data Sources and Methodology

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Legislature directed the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code to recommend changes to the law that would “simplify and rationalize” California’s Penal Code. As part of this mandate, the Committee has studied the history and current practice of California’s death penalty system.

After a thorough examination, the Committee has determined that the death penalty as created and enforced in California has not and cannot ensure justice and fairness for all Californians.

More than forty years of experience have shown that the death penalty is the opposite of a simple and rational scheme. It has become so complicated and costly that it takes decades for cases to be fully resolved and it is imposed so arbitrarily – and in such a discriminatory fashion – that it cannot be called rational, fair, or constitutional. Hundreds of California death sentences adjudicated in state and federal courts have been reversed or otherwise thrown out as unconstitutional while only 33 people are currently eligible for execution.

Furthermore, recent efforts to improve, simplify and expedite California’s system of capital punishment have failed to accomplish their stated goals and may have made things even worse.

For the reasons in this report, which includes new data presented here for the first time, the Committee unanimously recommends repealing California’s death penalty. Because we appreciate that this is a difficult goal, in the interim, the Committee unanimously recommends reducing the size of California’s death row by the following means:

- Award clemency to commute death sentences.
- Settle pending legal challenges to death sentences.
- Recall death sentences under Penal Code § 1170(d)(1).
- Limit the felony-murder special circumstance.
- Restore judicial discretion to dismiss special circumstances.
- Amend the Racial Justice Act of 2020 to give it retroactive application.
- Remove from death row people who are permanently mentally incompetent.

Recommendations

Recommendations

Repeal the death penalty

For the reasons described in this report, the death penalty should be repealed in California and California's death row should be dismantled.

Reduce the size of death row

Even without repeal of the death penalty, the Governor, Attorney General, Legislature, and local prosecutors can take significant steps to reduce the size of California's death row. These decision-makers should take these steps while awaiting repeal of the death penalty.

Clemency

The Governor should use his executive clemency power to reduce the size of death row by commuting death sentences. Though no California governor has granted clemency to a condemned person since the death penalty's return to California in 1977, multiple governors in other states have broadly granted clemency to people on death row, even while the death penalty remained in their states.¹ The California Supreme Court, which must separately approve clemency for anyone who has a prior felony conviction, should also promptly adjudicate clemency petitions presented to the Court.²

Settle pending post-conviction cases

The Attorney General has the power to resolve death penalty cases on post-conviction review.³ Attorneys General in California have done this a handful of times. The Attorney General should take a more proactive approach to seeking resolution in all death penalty cases in post-conviction review.

Recall and resentencing in death penalty cases

Local district attorneys have the authority to request recall and resentencing in any case, but the ultimate decision of whether to resentencing an individual is made by a Superior Court judge.⁴ This process should be used by District Attorneys to pursue resentencing of death cases from their counties.

Legislative reforms

1. Reform the felony-murder special circumstance

Current law allows people to be sentenced to death even if they did not personally kill or intend anyone to die. This was not always the case: as originally enacted, California's death penalty could not be imposed on accomplices unless they had an intent to kill.⁵ In 1990, voters approved Proposition 115, which permitted a death sentence or life without the possibility of parole for an accomplice to a felony who did not personally kill nor intend for anyone to die, if the person acted with reckless indifference and was a major participant in the felony offense where someone was killed.⁶

The Legislature should reverse the expansion of the felony-murder special circumstance enacted through Proposition 115 and should provide retroactive relief to those currently serving sentences based on this provision.⁷

¹ Death Penalty Information Center, *List of Clemencies Since 1976: Notable Grants of Clemency*.

² When a candidate for clemency has a felony conviction from a separate proceeding, a majority of the California Supreme Court must also approve the clemency. California Constitution, Article V, § 8(a). At least 68% of people on death row have prior felony convictions and would need California Supreme Court approval for sentence commutation from the Governor. Data provided by CDCR Office of Research as of July 31, 2021.

³ See Samuel Weisovitz, *The California Attorney General's Constitutional Authority Over Criminal Justice Reform During the Covid-19 Pandemic*, SCOCA Blog, Apr. 21, 2020. See also Am. Bar Assn., *Criminal Justice Standards for the Prosecution Function*, Standard 3-8.5 (model ethical rule for post-conviction review directs prosecutors to "consider potential negotiated dispositions or other remedies, if the prosecutor and the prosecutor's office reasonably conclude that the interests of justice are thereby served").

⁴ Penal Code § 1170(d)(1). For most capital cases, a judge may only convert a death sentence into a life without parole sentence. But for any death penalty case in which the offense occurred before June 5, 1990, the judge may also dismiss the special circumstances and impose a sentence of 25 years to life with parole, or another sentence depending on the specific enhancements and charges proven. This is because on June 5, 1990, the voters passed Proposition 115, which created Penal Code § 1385.1 and removed from judges the discretion to dismiss special circumstances after they have been found true.

⁵ *People v. Anderson*, 43 Cal.3d 1104, 1147 (1987).

⁶ Penal Code § 190.2(d).

⁷ Senate Bill 300 (Cortese), introduced in the Legislature in 2021, is one example of this type of Legislative reform. This bill requires a two-thirds vote to pass in the Legislature because it amends Penal Code sections created by Proposition 115.

2. *Judicial dismissal of special circumstances*

Current law allows judges to dismiss charges and enhancements in almost any case.⁸ But when “special circumstances” are charged, making the case one where a death or life without parole sentence can be imposed, a judge cannot dismiss these allegations after they have been found true by a jury or admitted by the defendant.⁹ This was not always the case: this limitation was also imposed through Proposition 115.

The Legislature should restore to judges the power to dismiss special circumstances in all cases.¹⁰

3. *Make the California Racial Justice Act of 2020 retroactive*

In 2020, the Legislature enacted the Racial Justice Act to eliminate racial bias and racially discriminatory practices in the criminal legal system, including both capital and non-capital cases.¹¹ But the Racial Justice Act only applies prospectively and does not apply to cases adjudicated prior to January 1, 2021.

The Legislature should make the Racial Justice Act retroactive.¹²

4. *Create a process to remove the permanently incompetent from death row*

More than three decades ago, the United States Supreme Court held that incompetent people cannot be executed.¹³ Nevertheless, there are at least 6 people on California’s death row who may be permanently incompetent and, if they are, could not be executed.¹⁴ Current law provides no clear process to remove these people from death row.

The Legislature should modify the existing statute regarding incompetency proceedings to create a clear process to resentence people who are permanently incompetent and cannot be legally executed.

⁸ Penal Code § 1385.

⁹ Penal Code § 1385.1.

¹⁰ Two bills that would accomplish this goal were introduced in the Legislature in 2021, Assembly Bill 1224 (Levine 2021), and SB 300 (Cortese 2021). AB 1224 was not successful while SB 300 continues to move through the legislative process. Both required a two-thirds vote to pass the Legislature because they amend Penal Code sections created by Proposition 115.

¹¹ Assembly Bill No. 2542 (2019–2020 Reg. Sess.) (creating Penal Code § 745).

¹² Assembly Bill 256 (Kaira), introduced in 2021, would make the Racial Justice Act retroactive and continues to move through the legislative process.

¹³ *Ford v. Wainwright*, 477 U.S. 399 (1986).

¹⁴ The cases are cited in Part VII below.

Analysis and Data

Analysis and Data

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

California has the largest population of condemned people in the country.¹⁵ Currently, 697 people are on death row.¹⁶ More than 1,000 people have been sentenced to death since 1978 in California,¹⁷ but no executions have occurred in the last 15 years. Only 13 executions have taken place since reinstatement of the death penalty in 1978.¹⁸ During that time, 235 death sentences have been reversed as unconstitutional or otherwise improper.¹⁹

More than half the people on death row are awaiting appointment of post-conviction counsel. The appellate and post-conviction litigation process is almost unfathomably long and costly. It now averages more than 30 years for people convicted of capital offenses to exhaust their appeals.²⁰ California has spent more than 4 billion tax dollars on the death penalty since it was reinstated in 1977.²¹ Only 33 people have completed post-conviction review of their case and are currently eligible for execution.²²

Meanwhile, over the past decade, California voters have narrowly supported the death penalty in three propositions on the ballot in 2012 and 2016.²³ California has tried to make the death penalty system work. The state has enacted statutes and constitutional provisions to prioritize death penalty cases, to expedite record review and to provide victims with speedy resolution of cases.²⁴ The state funds two state agencies and contracts with a third agency to provide defense services to the condemned.²⁵ At the federal level, the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act was enacted in 1996 in an effort to expedite review of death penalty cases in federal court.²⁶

These attempts to improve California's death penalty system have largely failed. The time to adjudicate death sentences has never been longer, and victims are no closer to resolution.

At the same time, 5 people — all men of color — on death row have been found innocent and exonerated.²⁷ And decades of research have shown disturbing racial disparities in who is sentenced to death.²⁸ People of color currently make up 68% of death row.²⁹ At least a third of people currently condemned to death have been diagnosed with serious mental illness and 6 of them may be permanently incompetent.³⁰ The death penalty is also not used uniformly in California: a handful of counties account for the majority of the recent death sentences imposed in the state.³¹

Against this convoluted and conflicted backdrop, the Committee undertook its analysis of the current state of the death penalty. The Committee conducted a lengthy hearing in March 2021 and heard from academic experts about the history and current application of California's death penalty.³² Committee staff also consulted extensively with practitioners and other experts from across California and collected relevant data. This report reviews the extensive literature on California's death penalty, including new studies and data not previously available.

After careful consideration, the Committee has unanimously concluded that the death penalty should be repealed in California and that the size of California's death row should be reduced.

15 Death Penalty Information Center, *Death Row* (next largest death row is Florida's with 347 people).

16 CDCR, *Condemned Inmate List* (as of September 3, 2021). This list is posted monthly by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and appears to include people whose death sentences were reversed in post-conviction proceedings and whose cases remain unresolved. CDCR's public list also does not include one person who is listed as condemned in his individual inmate record. According to the Habeas Corpus Resource Center, which is required by California Rule of Court 4.561(c) to maintain a list of people subject to a judgment of death, the number of people under sentence of death in California is 677 as of September 8, 2021.

17 Office of the State Public Defender, *California's Broken Death Penalty*, March 2021, 58.

18 CDCR, *Inmates Executed 1978 to Present*.

19 This information comes from the Office of the State Public Defender, *California's Broken Death Penalty*, March 2021, 58–59, as well as supplemental information from the Office of the State Public Defender and the Habeas Corpus Resource Center provided in September 2021.

20 Habeas Corpus Resource Center, *Annual Report 2020*, at 9–13 (2020) (*HCRC Report*).

21 Judge Arthur L. Alarcon and Paula M. Mitchell, *Executing the Will of the Voters?: A Roadmap to Mend or End the California Legislature's Multi-Billion Dollar Death Penalty Debacle*, 44 Loy. L.A. L. REV. 541 (2011).

22 Information provided by the Office of the State Public Defender.

23 Proposition 34, Abolition of the Death Penalty Initiative, failed with 48% of the vote in 2012. See California Secretary of State, *Statement of Vote*, General Election, November 6, 2012, 13; Proposition 62, Repeal of the Death Penalty failed with 47% of the vote in 2016. See California Secretary of State, *Statement of Vote*, General Election, November 8, 2016, 12; Proposition 66, Death Penalty Procedures, passed with 51% of the vote. California Secretary of State, *Statement of Vote*, General Election, November 8, 2016, 12.

24 See Penal Code §§ 190.6, 190.8; Cal. Const. Art. 1, § 28(a)(6).

25 The Habeas Corpus Resource Center is solely dedicated to death penalty work. The Office of the State Public Defender was solely dedicated to death penalty work until July 1, 2020, when it expanded to also provide training and technical assistance to county indigent defense providers. The California Appellate Project is a non-profit that is under contract with the Judicial Council of California to provide assistance to attorneys appointed to represent individuals on death row.

26 The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-132, 110 Stat. 1214.

27 Death Penalty Information Center, *Innocence Database*.

28 Research is discussed in Part V below.

29 Analysis of data provided by CDCR Office of Research.

30 See discussion in Part VII below.

31 From 2015–2020, six counties — Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, Kern, San Bernardino and Tulare — imposed 89% of the death sentences in the state. See California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California* reports from 2015–2020, Table 36.

32 Video of the meeting is available at the Committee's website.

FIGURE 1: DEATH SENTENCES, EXECUTIONS, AND NON-EXECUTION DEATHS IN CALIFORNIA (1978–2021)

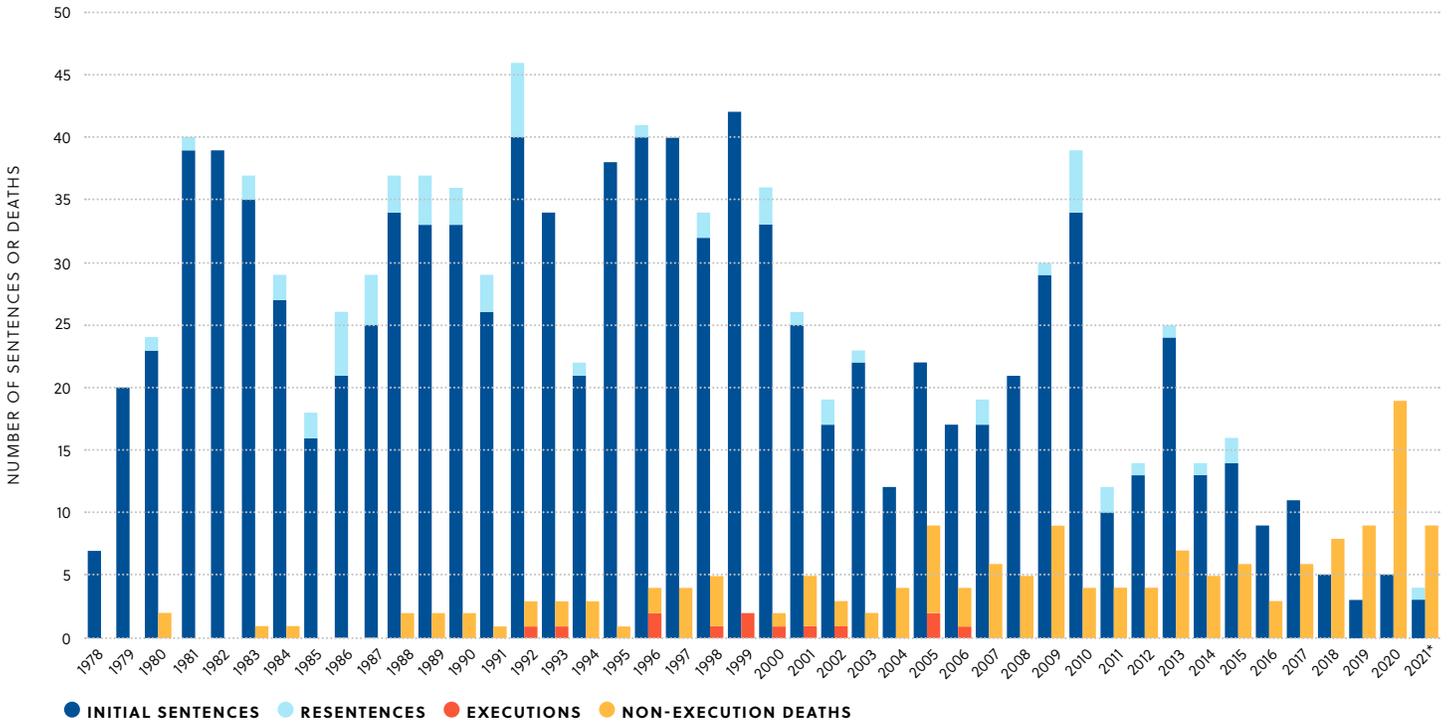
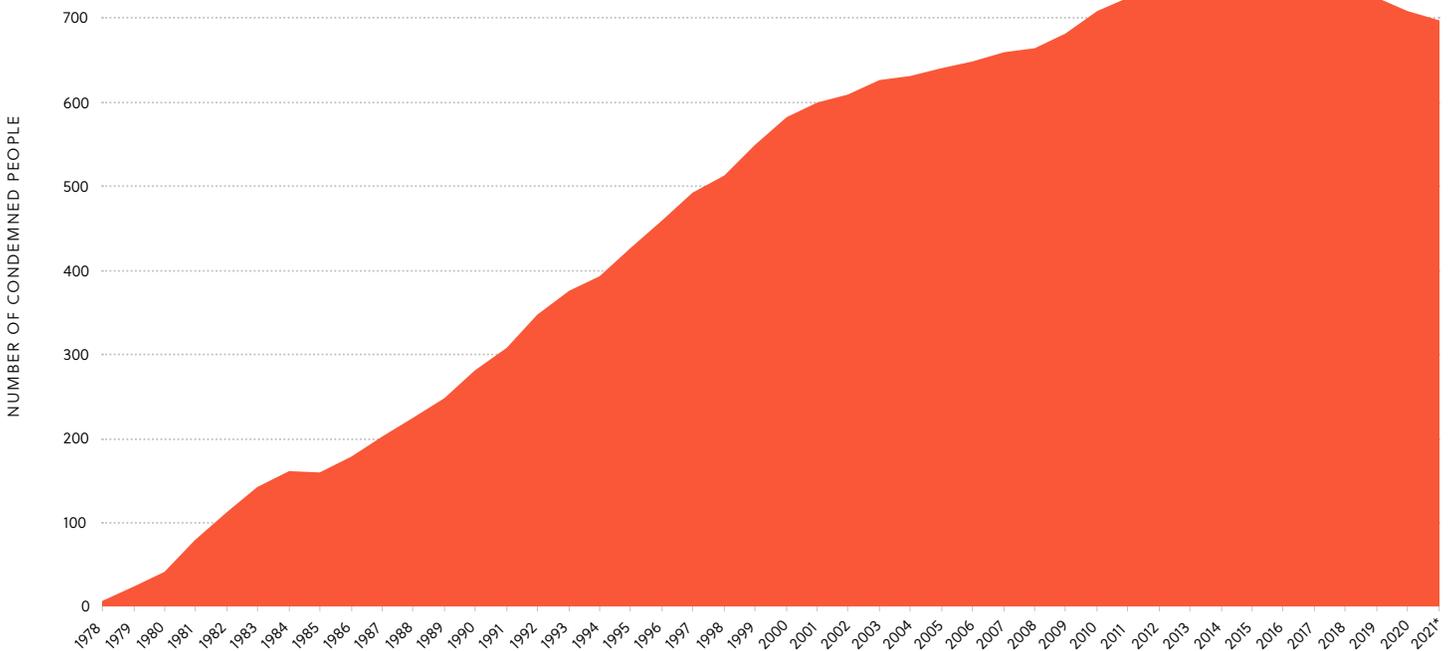


FIGURE 2: TOTAL NUMBER OF CONDEMNED PEOPLE AT END OF YEAR



*Data as of September 3, 2021 Sources: See Appendix.

II. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

The Committee's report is the first comprehensive examination of the death penalty in California by a state agency or organization since 2008. That 2008 report, by the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, conducted an exhaustive review of the state's death penalty system and concluded it was dysfunctional. The Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice identified three ways to address the dysfunction: (1) dramatically increase funding for the death penalty system, (2) narrow the scope of the death penalty or (3) repeal the death penalty altogether.³³ California did none of these things.

The Committee found that all the problems identified in 2008 have only gotten worse. As context for the Committee's report, what follows is an overview of the major changes in law and policy since that 2008 report. This overview shows that California's death penalty continues to be defined by intractable problems. We therefore take the recommendations of the Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice a step further to recommend abolition.

- In 2009, the American Law Institute, the nation's most prominent law reform body, voted to remove the death penalty from its Model Penal Code. The Model Penal Code's death penalty scheme had been a national basis for death penalty statutes and had been approved by the United States Supreme Court. As The New York Times put it, the American Law Institute "pronounced its project a failure and walked away from it."³⁴
- In 2014, a federal judge found that California's death penalty was unconstitutional because of long delays in executing people.³⁵ That legal decision was reversed, but only on procedural grounds, and the issue has not since been addressed in federal court or at the California Supreme Court.³⁶
- In 2016, California voters approved Proposition 66, which aimed to reduce costs, provide more attorneys for people on death row and speed up executions.³⁷ But more than four years later, costs have increased, just as many people on death row remain in need of post-conviction lawyers and delays in cases have continued to grow. In 2008, the capital case post-conviction review process took an average of 22 years.³⁸ Today, it's more than 30 years.³⁹ The death penalty costs taxpayers \$150 million a year.⁴⁰
- In 2018, Vincente Benavides Figueroa became the fifth person on California's modern death row to be exonerated. The California Supreme Court determined that Figueroa's convictions were based on false evidence of sexual assault.⁴¹
- In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a moratorium on executions in California. The Governor explained that "California's death penalty system is unfair, unjust, wasteful, protracted and does not make our state safer."⁴² The Governor also noted, "death sentences are unevenly and unfairly applied to people of color, people with mental disabilities, and people who cannot afford costly legal representation."⁴³

³³ California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, *Final Report, Death Penalty* at 112–182 (2008) (CCFAJ Report).

³⁴ Adam Liptak, *Group Gives Up Death Penalty Work*, New York Times, Jan. 11, 2010.

³⁵ *Jones v. Chappell*, 31 F.Supp.3d 1050, 1053 (C.D. Cal. 2014).

³⁶ *Jones v. Davis*, 806 F.3d 538, 543 (9th Cir. 2015).

³⁷ Voter Information Guide for 2016, General Election, 108–09 (2016).

³⁸ CCFAJ Report at 123.

³⁹ HCRRC Report at 10–13.

⁴⁰ Voter Information Guide for 2016, General Election, 81 (2016).

(Legislative Analyst's Office analysis of Proposition 62).

⁴¹ *In re Figueroa*, 4 Cal.5th 576, 588–89 (2018).

⁴² Governor's Exec. Order N-09-19 (Mar. 13, 2019).

⁴³ *Id.*

- In 2020, Governor Newsom took the unprecedented step of filing an amicus brief at the California Supreme Court to argue that the death penalty has been applied in an unconstitutional and racially-biased manner.⁴⁴
- In 2021, Rob Bonta was appointed California Attorney General by Governor Newsom. Attorney General Bonta reiterated his opposition to the death penalty after his appointment: “I think the death penalty is inhumane. It does not deter. Studies show it’s long had a disparate impact on defendants of color, especially when the victim is white.”⁴⁵ California’s last three Attorneys General expressed similar reservations about the death penalty while continuing to defend it in court.⁴⁶
- In addition to the state-wide moratorium on executions, District Attorneys in three major California jurisdictions — Los Angeles, San Francisco and Santa Clara Counties — have recently declared they will not seek the death penalty in any case and will work to resentence people now on death row.⁴⁷ These District Attorneys — as well as the District Attorneys from San Joaquin and Contra Costa counties — have also recently told the California Supreme Court that the death penalty as currently administered does not meet constitutional standards.⁴⁸ As a result, the majority of Californians live in a county where the elected District Attorney does not support California’s current death penalty.
- A group of nearly 100 current and former elected prosecutors, Attorneys General, and law enforcement leaders, including the current District Attorneys of Contra Costa, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Los Angeles Counties, recently stated: “[m]any have tried for over forty years to make America’s death penalty system just. Yet the reality is that our nation’s use of this sanction cannot be repaired, and it should be ended.”⁴⁹
- New death sentences have declined dramatically over the past decade: In 2010, 34 death sentences were imposed statewide.⁵⁰ In 2020, there were 5 new death sentences.⁵¹ So far in 2021, 3 new death sentences have been imposed.⁵²
- California’s most recent execution was 15 years ago. Exits from death row have exceeded new death sentences every year since 2017, when the death row population peaked at 746.⁵³ Since 1980, 156 people condemned to death have died of natural and non-execution causes, including 19 in 2020.⁵⁴ As of September 3, 2021, there are 697 people on death row.⁵⁵
- In 2021, Virginia became the first Southern state to repeal the death penalty⁵⁶ and the federal government under President Joseph Biden imposed a moratorium on executions.⁵⁷ Now, 23 states do not have a death penalty and two other states (in addition to California), as well as the federal government, have moratoriums on executing people.⁵⁸ As a result, a majority of states in the United States — as well as the majority of nations⁵⁹ — do not have the death penalty in law or practice.

Finally, last year, the nation was forced to briefly confront the reality of what a regularly-operating death penalty looks like. In the final months of President Donald Trump’s

44 Brief Of Amicus Curiae The Honorable Gavin Newsom In Support Of Defendant And Appellant in *People v. McDaniel*, No. S171393.

45 Bob Egelko, *California Attorney General Rob Bonta Sees State Moving Away From Death Penalty*, San Francisco Chronicle, May 17, 2021.

46 *Id.*

47 San Francisco District Attorney’s Office, Press Release, July 7, 2020; Los Angeles District Attorney’s Office, Special Directive 2011, Dec. 7, 2020; Robert Salonga, *Exclusive: Santa Clara DA Abandoning Death Penalty Pursuit in All Cases*, Mercury News, July 21, 2020.

48 Death Penalty Information Center, *California Governor, 6 District Attorneys File Briefs Saying State’s Death Penalty is Arbitrary and ‘Infected by Racism’*, October 28, 2020; Brief Amici Curiae of Six Present or Former District Attorneys in *People v. McDaniel*, No. S171393.

49 Fair and Just Prosecution, *Joint Statement By Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Leaders in Opposition to Application of the Federal Death Penalty*, Dec. 2020.

50 California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California 2020*, Table 35.

51 *Id.*

52 CDCR, *Condemned Inmate List*. Several months pass between a jury recommendation of death and final imposition of sentence. The number of death sentences in 2021 likely is partly a result of the limitations on conducting jury trials during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

53 See NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., *Death Row U.S.A. Reports for 2017–2020*.

54 CDCR, *Condemned Inmates Who Have Died Since 1978* (September 22, 2021).

55 CDCR, *Condemned Inmate List* (September 3, 2021).

56 Whitney Evans, *Virginia Governor Signs Law Abolishing The Death Penalty, A 1st In The South*, NPR, Mar. 24, 2021.

57 Memorandum of the Attorney General, *Moratorium on Federal Executions Pending Review of Policies and Procedures*, July 1, 2021.

58 Death Penalty Information Center, *State by State* (with 2021 selected as display year).

59 Death Penalty Information Center, *International*.

administration, the federal government executed 13 people over a six-month period.⁶⁰ The executions continued despite important legal questions unresolved in unsigned, late-night orders from the United States Supreme Court.⁶¹ Justice Sonia Sotomayor decried this “unprecedented, breakneck timetable of executions.”⁶² If California adopted the same pace of executions – an average of one every two weeks – it would take more than 25 years to clear death row.

III. LEGAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. History of California’s modern death penalty law.

California has had the death penalty since its founding.⁶³ Between 1930 and 1969, California executed 292 people.⁶⁴ But in 1972, the California Supreme Court struck down the death penalty as a violation of the state constitution’s prohibition against cruel or unusual punishment: “We have concluded that capital punishment is impermissibly cruel. It degrades and dehumanizes all who participate in its processes. It is unnecessary to any legitimate goal of the state and is incompatible with the dignity of man and the judicial process.”⁶⁵

The California Supreme Court’s ruling was short-lived. Nine months later, voters approved Proposition 17 to amend the California Constitution to explicitly allow capital punishment.⁶⁶

But the death penalty did not immediately return to California. Four months before Proposition 17 took effect, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Furman v. Georgia* that the death penalty as then administered violated the United States Constitution’s prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.⁶⁷ The crux of the ruling lay in the plurality’s conclusion that the death penalty had been applied in an arbitrary manner, summarized in the oft-quoted statement of Justice Potter Stewart that the death penalty is cruel and unusual “in the same way that being struck by lightning is cruel and unusual.”⁶⁸

The *Furman* decision invited states to enact new laws narrowing who deserved the ultimate punishment of death. The states proceeded in two ways: some, including California,⁶⁹ adopted statutes that required a death sentence in specific circumstances and others adopted the discretionary death penalty statute proposed by the American Law Institute in its Model Penal Code, which let jurors decide in a separate penalty proceeding whether death was appropriate.⁷⁰

Four years after the *Furman* ruling, the United States Supreme Court approved a discretionary statute in 1976 and America’s “modern” death penalty era began.⁷¹

In 1977, the California Legislature replaced the mandatory death penalty statute – which had been invalidated by the California Supreme Court⁷² – with one modeled on the Model Penal Code approved by the United States Supreme Court.⁷³ Then-Governor Jerry Brown vetoed the bill, but the Legislature overrode his veto, marking the death penalty’s official return to California.⁷⁴

The following year, California voters approved a ballot initiative to expand the death penalty. The initiative was dubbed the “Briggs Initiative” after its proponent Senator

60 James Romoser, *Over Sharp Dissents, Court Intervenes To Allow Federal Government To Execute 13th Person In Six Months*, SCOTUSblog, Jan. 16, 2021.

61 *Id.*

62 *United States v. Higgs*, 592 U.S. ___ (2021) (Sotomayor, dis. opn.).

63 Kara Dansky, *Understanding California Sentencing*, 43 *University of San Francisco Law Review* 45, 47–50 (2008).

64 United States Department of Justice, *Capital Punishment 1977*, Table 2.

65 *People v. Anderson*, 6 Cal.3d 628, 656 (1972). The California Supreme Court’s decision came eight months after the United States Supreme Court had upheld the California death penalty in *McGautha v. California*, 402 U.S. 183 (1971).

66 California Proposition 17 (1972).

67 *Furman v. Georgia*, 408 U.S. 238 (1972).

68 *Id.* at 309 (concurring opinion of Justice Stewart).

69 *Stats.* 1973, ch. 719, pp. 1297–1302.

70 Russell Dean Covey, *Exorcizing Wechsler’s Ghost: The Influence of the Model Penal Code on Death Penalty Sentencing Jurisprudence*, 31 *Hastings Const. L.Q.* 189, 207 (2004).

71 *Gregg v. Georgia*, 428 U.S. 153, 193–195 (1976) (joint opinion of Justices Stewart, Powell and Stevens).

72 *Rockwell v. Superior Court*, 18 Cal.3d 420, 445 (1976).

73 See *People v. Frierson*, 25 Cal.3d 142, 174–76 (1979) (describing SB 155).

74 Wallace Turner, *California Legislature Overrides Veto of Death Penalty*, *New York Times*, Aug. 12, 1977.

John Briggs and officially identified as Proposition 7.⁷⁵ The initiative expanded the scope of California's death penalty to effectively encompass nearly all homicides.⁷⁶ As described in the voter materials, the initiative would "give every Californian the protection of the nation's toughest, most effective death penalty law" that would "apply to every murderer."⁷⁷

In the years that followed, California's death penalty statute was expanded even further.⁷⁸ For example, subsequent amendments expanded the law to allow a sentence of death or life in prison without parole even if the defendant did not kill or intend to kill, and removed a judge's discretion to dismiss special circumstances, making life without parole the mandatory minimum punishment for anyone convicted of first-degree murder with special circumstances.⁷⁹

In 2016, voters approved Proposition 66 to "speed up" the review of death penalty judgments in an effort to "fix" the system.⁸⁰ As described below, four years after the passage of Proposition 66, the pace of litigation in death penalty cases has only slowed further.

B. California's modern death penalty process.

In California, a case becomes a potential death penalty case when the district attorney charges murder with special circumstances, which carries only two possible punishments: death or life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.⁸¹

Death penalty trials have two parts: a guilt phase and a punishment phase. The guilt phase is similar to any murder trial with the additional requirement that the prosecution must prove the alleged special circumstances,⁸² such as committing the murder for financial gain⁸³ or the victim being a police officer.⁸⁴ The punishment phase is unlike other criminal trials. During the punishment phase, the prosecution presents aggravating evidence — why the defendant should be executed — and the defense presents mitigating evidence — why the defendant should receive a life sentence for his or her crime(s).⁸⁵ The jury is asked to weigh the aggravating and mitigating evidence and determine if death or life without parole is the appropriate punishment.⁸⁶ If the jury chooses life without parole, the judge must impose that sentence; the judge has no discretion to impose a sentence of death and no discretion to impose a lesser sentence of life imprisonment with the possibility of parole.⁸⁷ But if the jury chooses death, the judge retains the discretion to choose life without parole or may impose the death sentence.⁸⁸

Following imposition of a death sentence, the post-conviction process begins. This process has three parts. First, the California Constitution requires an automatic, direct appeal in all death penalty cases to the California Supreme Court.⁸⁹ The direct appeal considers legal challenges to the death sentence based solely on evidence and argument that was presented at the defendant's trial. In recent times, death penalty cases have accounted for about a quarter the California Supreme Court's work.⁹⁰

Second, in addition to the direct appeal, a person under sentence of death will also pursue a habeas corpus challenge in state court.⁹¹ The state habeas corpus challenge considers evidence that was not available or presented during trial.⁹²

Third, following the completion of review of the death judgement in state court, the person sentenced to death can file a habeas corpus challenge in federal court.

⁷⁵ Some supporters of this voter initiative — including the people who ran the campaign and wrote the language of the law — now support repealing the death penalty. See Adam Nagourney, *Seeking an End to an Execution Law They Once Championed*, New York Times, April 6, 2012.

⁷⁶ Steven F. Shatz and Nina Rivkind, *The California Death Penalty Scheme: Requiem for Furman?*, 72 N.Y.U. L.Rev. 1283, 1310 & n. 154 (1997).
⁷⁷ Voter Information Guide for 1978, General Election, 34 (1978) (Argument in Favor of Proposition 7).

⁷⁸ Catherine M. Grosso, et al., *Death by Stereotype: Race, Ethnicity, and California's Failure to Implement Furman's Narrowing Requirement*, 66 UCLA L.Rev. 1394, 1406 (2019).

⁷⁹ Proposition 115 (1990). Proposition 115 overrode the California Supreme Court opinions in *Carlos v. Superior Court*, 35 Cal. 3d 131 (1983), and *People v. Anderson*, 43 Cal. 3d 1104 (1987). Other initiatives added more special circumstances — killing a juror, "car-jacking," "drive-by-shootings," and "gang related" murders — and expanded the definitions of kidnapping and arson under the felony-murder special circumstance. Proposition 195 (1996); Proposition 196 (1996); Proposition 21 (2000).

⁸⁰ Proposition 66 passed with 51% of the vote. California Secretary of State, *Statement of Vote, General Election, November 8, 2016*, 12.

⁸¹ Penal Code §§ 190, 190.2.

⁸² Penal Code § 190.1.

⁸³ Penal Code § 190.2(a)(1).

⁸⁴ Penal Code § 190.2(a)(7).

⁸⁵ Penal Code §§ 190.3, 190.4.

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ Penal Code § 190.4(e); Penal Code § 1385.1.

⁸⁸ Penal Code § 190.4(e).

⁸⁹ Cal. Constitution Art. IV § 11.

⁹⁰ Jeannine Bell, *Setting Precedent, An Interview with Justice Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar*, Contexts, October 25, 2021; Editorial Board, *Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye Holds Courts*, Sacramento Bee, March 13, 2016; David Ettinger, *Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye Discusses State of Courts*, At the Lectern, Jan. 19, 2015.

⁹¹ Penal Code § 1473.

⁹² California law had previously required all habeas petitions in death penalty cases to be filed at the California Supreme Court. Proposition 66 shifted these cases to the Superior Courts, though the Supreme Court retains discretion to keep cases previously filed there. Penal Code § 1509.

The purpose of this challenge is to determine if the state court correctly resolved legal issues based on the U.S. Constitution. These proceedings are governed by the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), passed by Congress in 1996 with the goal of increasing the speed of federal review of death penalty cases.⁹³ Obtaining reversal of a death judgment in federal court is extremely difficult.⁹⁴

C. Most death sentences are eventually overturned by courts.

Despite extra safeguards at trial and a difficult standard of post-conviction review, most sentences of death ultimately are reversed in California and throughout the United States.⁹⁵ Of more than 1,000 death sentences imposed in California since 1978, only 50 people have completed the post-conviction review process.⁹⁶ Eleven of those people have been executed and 6 have died of natural causes, leaving only 33 people currently eligible for execution.⁹⁷ Far more – 235 people – have had their death judgments reversed.⁹⁸

Of these reversed cases, 165 people obtained relief in state court.⁹⁹ Although the California Supreme Court affirms 90% of the death penalty cases it decides,¹⁰⁰ California death sentences are frequently reversed in federal court after decades of litigation expenditures in the state courts. Federal courts have granted relief in 70 of the 119 California capital cases that have final federal judgments – a reversal rate of 59%.¹⁰¹

As explained by Sean Kennedy, Executive Director of the Center for Juvenile Law and Policy at Loyola Law School, who presented to the Committee in March, “federal judges have been more willing to find that an error may have been prejudicial, specifically at the penalty phase, because of the understanding that a wide variety of mitigators can appeal to at least one juror sitting on the penalty phase and change the verdict.”¹⁰² Most of the people who obtained relief in state or federal court were resentenced to life without parole or less.¹⁰³

D. California does not have a functional method to execute people.

Following the execution of Clarence Ray Allen in 2006, a federal district court concluded that California’s lethal-injection protocol could cause “pain so extreme that it offends the Eighth Amendment.”¹⁰⁴ This ruling resulted in a court-imposed moratorium on executions while the state devised a new execution protocol.

Shortly after taking office in 2019, Governor Newsom issued an order imposing an executive moratorium on all executions, stating “California’s death penalty system is unfair, unjust, wasteful, protracted and does not make our state safer.”¹⁰⁵ The Governor also noted, “death sentences are unevenly and unfairly applied to people of color, people with mental disabilities, and people who cannot afford costly legal representation.”¹⁰⁶ In addition to granting a reprieve to all individuals on death row, the Governor ordered the death chamber dismantled and halted all steps to devise a new method of execution.¹⁰⁷

In light of the Governor’s moratorium, the parties settled the court challenge to California’s execution protocol, though the case will automatically be reinstated should Governor Newsom’s moratorium be lifted.¹⁰⁸

E. Most states do not have the death penalty in practice or effect.

At its height in 2004, the death penalty was law in the United States in all but 12 states.¹⁰⁹ Since 2004, the death penalty has been overturned – either through legislative repeal or

93 See Ken Armstrong, *Death By Deadline: Part One*, The Marshall Project, Nov. 15, 2014 (section titled “Passing habeas reform”).

94 See 28 U.S.C. § 2254(d) (relief is only available if state court decision “was contrary to, or involved an unreasonable application of, clearly established Federal law, as determined by the Supreme Court of the United States.”). See also Radley Balko, *Opinion: Joe Biden Fought This Destructive Law. 25 Years Later He Can Help Repeal It*, Washington Post, April 27, 2021 (“This pernicious, dizzyingly complicated law created a minefield of procedural barriers and deadlines that, if not scrupulously followed, prohibit federal courts from reviewing the merits of state convictions.”)

95 Frank R. Baumgartner, et al., *Deadly Justice: A Statistical Portrait of the Death Penalty*, 139 (2018) (noting that between 1973 and 2013, reversal of the sentence on appeal was the most frequent outcome in death penalty cases nationally).

96 Information provided by the Office of the State Public Defender.

97 *Id.* Though only 11 people have been executed after completing the post-conviction process, the total number of people executed in California since reinstatement of the death penalty is 13 because 2 individuals waived their appeals and volunteered for execution. See Death Penalty Information Center, *Execution Volunteers*.

98 This information comes from the Office of the State Public Defender, *California’s Broken Death Penalty*, March 2021, 58–59, as well as supplemental information from the Office of the State Public Defender and the Habeas Corpus Resource Center provided in September 2021.

99 *Id.* at 62–63. The California Supreme Court has reversed death sentences 128 times in 759 direct appeals. Forty of the reversals were related to guilt-phase issues and 88 were related to penalty phase issues. Thirty-seven state habeas corpus petitions have been granted, including 12 on guilt-phase issues and 25 on penalty issues.

100 *California’s Broken Death Penalty* at 59. Almost half of these reversals (59) occurred between 1979 and 1986, when the California Supreme Court reversed 92% of the death penalty cases it reviewed. See CCFJA Report at 120–21, n.21 (2008). In 1986, three California Supreme Court justices lost reelection in a campaign “dominated by the death penalty.” Stephen B. Bright and Patrick J. Keenan, *Judges and the Politics of Death: Deciding Between the Bill of Rights and the Next Election in Capital Cases*, 75 B.U. L.Rev. 759, 761 (1995). Since that time, the California Supreme Court has affirmed almost 90% of death penalty cases. See CCFJA Report, at 120–21, n. 21.

101 *California’s Broken Death Penalty* at 58–59.

102 Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 1, 0:40:22–0:42:07.

103 *Id.* See also *California’s Broken Death Penalty* at 60 (69% of people who were resentenced received a non-death sentence).

104 *Morales v. Tilton*, 465 F. Supp. 2d 972, 974 (N.D. Cal. 2006).

105 Governor’s Exec. Order N-09-19 (Mar. 13, 2019).

106 *Id.*

107 *Id.*

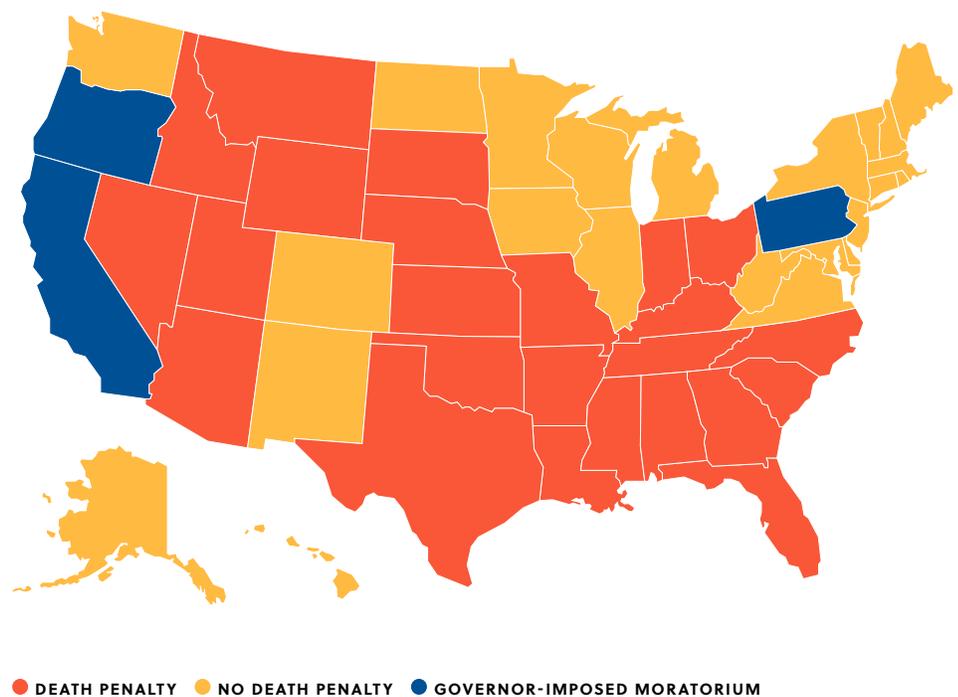
108 *Morales v. Diaz*, 3:06-cv-00219-RS (N.D. Cal. Jul. 24, 2020), ECF No. 755.

109 Death Penalty Information Center, *State by State*.

through decisions of the state’s highest court – in 11 additional states.¹¹⁰ In March 2021, Virginia became the 23rd – and first Southern – state to eliminate the death penalty.¹¹¹ In addition, beyond California, the governors of Oregon and Pennsylvania have placed a moratorium on executions, making 26 states that do not have the death penalty in law or effect.¹¹² Another 14 states have not carried out an execution in five years.¹¹³

In total, 39 states have not carried out an execution for five years or do not have the death penalty in law. Additionally, the United States Attorney General recently announced a moratorium on federal executions, citing “arbitrariness in [the death penalty’s] application, disparate impact on people of color, and the troubling number of exonerations in capital and other serious cases.”¹¹⁴

FIGURE 3: DEATH PENALTY STATUS BY STATE



Source: Death Penalty Information Center.

¹¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹¹ Whitney Evans, *Virginia Governor Signs Law Abolishing The Death Penalty, A 1st In The South*, NPR, Mar. 24, 2021.

¹¹² Death Penalty Information Center, *State by State*.

¹¹³ Death Penalty Information Center, *States With No Recent Executions*.

¹¹⁴ Memorandum of Attorney General Merrick Garland, *Moratorium on Federal Executions Pending Review of Policies and Procedures*, July 1, 2021.

¹¹⁵ The American Law Institute, *Model Penal Code*; Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 1, 0:11:00–0:11:35.

¹¹⁶ Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 1, 0:16:09–0:16:39.

In 2009, the Model Penal Code Committee at the American Law Institute voted to withdraw the model capital statute on which the California capital statute and those of many other states are based, finding that there are “institutional and structural obstacles to ensuring a minimally adequate system for administering capital punishment.”¹¹⁵ As noted by Committee panelist Carol Steiker, co-director of the Criminal Justice Policy Program at Harvard Law School, this was the first change made to the Model Penal Code since its promulgation in 1962.¹¹⁶

Internationally, the death penalty is used in only a small minority of countries.¹¹⁷ Several international treaties and covenants either restrict or prohibit use of the death penalty.¹¹⁸ The vast majority of executions are carried out by China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt.¹¹⁹

IV. LEGAL PROBLEMS WITH CALIFORNIA'S DEATH PENALTY

California's death penalty system has several legal infirmities that set it apart from other states with capital punishment.

A. California's death penalty applies to almost any murder.

As discussed above, under controlling authority from the United States Supreme Court, death penalty statutes must limit death eligibility to those most culpable for committing the gravest murders. Yet California's death penalty statute fails to meaningfully narrow death eligibility because nearly all homicides fit under one or more special circumstance. The most recent research shows that 95% of all first-degree murder convictions and 59% of all second-degree murder and voluntary manslaughter convictions were technically death eligible.¹²⁰ Other research made similar findings.¹²¹

B. Jurors do not need to agree on why someone should receive the death penalty and do not need to be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that death is appropriate.

California juries are not required to unanimously agree on aggravating factors during penalty phase deliberations of a death penalty trial.¹²² They also are not required to find beyond a reasonable doubt that aggravating factors outweigh mitigating factors or that death is the appropriate punishment.¹²³ As a result, individual jurors could have different assessments of the truth or weight of the aggravating and mitigating factors. And some jurors might vote for death, despite lingering concerns consistent with reasonable doubt as to the appropriate punishment.

The California Supreme Court opined at length about these issues in a recent opinion.¹²⁴ Though unanimously rejecting that death sentences should be reversed for these reasons, the Court noted that the Attorney General had acknowledged that requiring jury unanimity and findings beyond a reasonable doubt "would improve our system of capital punishment and make it even more reliable."¹²⁵

In the same case, Governor Newsom took the unprecedented step of filing an amicus brief urging the Court to require unanimity and findings beyond a reasonable doubt for juries making penalty phase decisions to help remove "the intolerable influence of racial bias."¹²⁶ The Governor noted that "[n]ationally and in California, non-unanimous verdicts have been intended to entrench White jurors' control of deliberations."¹²⁷ An amicus brief on behalf of the District Attorneys for the counties of Los Angeles, San Joaquin, Contra Costa, Santa Clara and San Francisco was filed in the same case, arguing that the failure to instruct on unanimity and to require findings beyond a reasonable doubt amplifies the arbitrariness in application of California's death penalty.¹²⁸

¹¹⁷ Death Penalty Information Center, *International*.

¹¹⁸ Amnesty International, *Death Penalty*.

¹¹⁹ *Id.*

¹²⁰ David C. Baldus, et al., Furman at 45: *Constitutional Challenges from California's Failure to (Again) Narrow Death Eligibility*, 16(4) *J. Emp. Legal Studies* 693, 707–724 (2019) (study of thousands of California convictions for first-degree murder, second-degree murder and voluntary manslaughter with offense dates between January 1978 and June 2002 concluded that 95% of all first-degree murder convictions were death-eligible, the highest eligibility rate in the country. Of the death-eligible cases, only 4.3% resulted in a death sentence).

¹²¹ Steven F. Shatz and Naomi R. Shatz, *Chivalry Is Not Dead: Murder, Gender and the Death Penalty*, 27 *Berkeley J. Gender L. & Just.* 64, 93 (2012) (study of all first-degree murder convictions from 2003–2005 found that 84.6% of convictions were death-eligible but that death sentences were imposed in only 5.5% of cases); Steven F. Shatz and Nina Rivkind, *The California Death Penalty Scheme: Requiem for Furman?*, 72 *N.Y.U. L. Rev.* 1283, 1332–43 (1997) (study sampled appellate first-degree murder cases from 1988–1992 and found that 84% of first-degree murder convictions were factually death-eligible but that death sentences were imposed in only 9.6% of the cases).

¹²² *People v. McDaniel*, 12 Cal. 5th 97, 2021 WL 3779752, *23–*27 (Cal. Aug. 26, 2021).

¹²³ *Id.* at *28–*32.

¹²⁴ *Id.*

¹²⁵ *Id.* at *23.

¹²⁶ Brief Of Amicus Curiae The Honorable Gavin Newsom In Support Of Defendant And Appellant in *People v. McDaniel*, No. S171393, 76.

¹²⁷ *Id.* at 22.

¹²⁸ Brief Amici Curiae of Six Present or Former District Attorneys in *People v. McDaniel*, No. S171393.

C. Extreme delays caused by overall dysfunction make death sentences irrational.

In 2014, the overall dysfunction of California's death penalty led a federal district court to conclude that the death penalty as administered in California violated the ban on cruel and unusual punishment. The court concluded that "systemic delay has made execution so unlikely that the death sentence carefully and deliberately imposed by the jury has been quietly transformed into one no rational jury or legislature could ever impose: life in prison, with the remote possibility of death."¹²⁹ This ruling was reversed by the Ninth Circuit on procedural grounds.¹³⁰ The issue has yet to be addressed by another court.

D. The facts of capital cases are not reviewed by courts to ensure the death sentence is proportional to the crime.

Proportionality review – comparing cases to ensure fair and proportional sentencing—is an important safeguard to address bias in the criminal legal system. There are two forms of proportionality review: inter-case review compares outcomes across individuals in different cases while intra-case review compares outcomes among defendants involved in the same event. California is one of only a handful of states that does not require inter-case proportionality review of death sentences across different cases.¹³¹

California has numerous stark examples of disproportionality, including multiple cases in which an accomplice who did not kill was sentenced to death while the individual who actually committed the murder was not.¹³² The most prolific serial killer in California history was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, while individuals who did not kill or intend to kill remain on death row under felony-murder special circumstances.¹³³ In some cases, the accomplice who did not kill remains on death row while the actual killer has already been released on parole.¹³⁴

V. CALIFORNIA'S DEATH PENALTY IS RACIALLY BIASED

A. California's history of lynching.

Elisabeth Semel, director of the University of California, Berkeley Death Penalty Clinic, told the Committee that the "death penalty in California today is a product of its history. Its history, and therefore its present-day administration, is marred by race discrimination that influences every stage of the proceedings."¹³⁵ America's history of racial violence against people of color, especially through the practice of lynching, must be considered when discussing capital punishment.¹³⁶

While lynching was more prominent in Southern states, it also happened in California. Lynchings in California mirrored those in Southern states where ethnic minorities were disproportionately targeted for violence.¹³⁷ The California Supreme Court has described California's history of "vigilante justice and public hangings"¹³⁸ and at least 350 people may have been lynched in California between 1850 and 1935.¹³⁹ Although lynching was an extra-judicial process, the practice was closely tied to the criminal legal system because it regularly occurred in response to an allegation of serious crime.¹⁴⁰

In the mid-20th century, as calls to end the practice of lynching grew, the promise of swift, officially-sanctioned executions were offered as a compromise.¹⁴¹ United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart acknowledged the role of capital punishment in curtailing lynching, writing that the "expression of society's moral outrage" channeled by capital punishment "is essential in an ordered society that asks its citizens to rely on legal processes, rather than self-help to vindicate their wrongs."¹⁴²

¹²⁹ *Jones v. Chappell*, 31 F.Supp.3d 1050, 1053 (C.D. Cal. 2014).

¹³⁰ *Jones v. Davis*, 806 F.3d 538, 543 (9th Cir. 2015).

¹³¹ See *People v. Taylor*, 47 Cal.4th 850, 900 (2009); *Pulley v. Harris*, 465 U.S. 37, 50–51 (1984); Submission by the ACLU of Northern California to the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, Jan. 9, 2008; Timothy V. Kaufman-Osborn, *Capital Punishment, Proportionality Review, and Claims of Fairness (With Lessons from Washington State)*, 79 Wash. L. Rev. 775, 790–792 (2004).

¹³² For example, Jarvis Masters was sentenced to death for allegedly producing a weapon that was used to kill a correctional officer, while the individuals responsible for the killing received lesser sentences. *In re Masters*, 7 Cal.5th 1054 (2019). See also *People v. Howard*, 51 Cal. 4th 15, 39–40 (2010); *People v. McDermott* 28 Cal.4th 946 (2002).

¹³³ Laurel Wamsley, *Golden State Killer Sentenced To Life In Prison Without Possibility Of Parole*, National Public Radio, Aug. 21, 2020; Maura Ewing, *I've Made My Share of Wrongs, But I Haven't Killed No One*, The Appeal, Feb. 9, 2019 (discussing the case of Demetrius Howard who was sentenced to death as an accomplice in a robbery while the actual killer received a lesser sentence).

¹³⁴ *People v. Gordon*, 50 Cal.3d 1223, 1234–1235 (1990). Patrick Gordon was the getaway driver who waited in the car while two other individuals entered a store and killed an armored truck driver. Gordon was sentenced to death while the other two individuals were sentenced to life without parole. Michael Caputo, the admitted trigger man, had his sentence commuted to life with parole and was released on parole in 2019. Communication from counsel for Mr. Gordon.

¹³⁵ Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 2, 0:20:59–0:21:12.

¹³⁶ Between 1865 and 1950, at least 6,400 people were lynched in the United States. Equal Justice Initiative, *Reconstruction in America: Racial Violence after the Civil War, 1865–1876*, 44 (2020).

¹³⁷ Richard Delgado, *The Law of the Noose: A History of Latino Lynching*, 44 Harv. Civil Rights-Civil Liberties L.Rev. 297, 301 (2009) (citing William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928*, 37 J. Soc. Hist. 411, 415 (2003)).

¹³⁸ *People v. Anderson*, 6 Cal.3d 628, 641–42, 645 (1972).

¹³⁹ Gustavo Arellano, *Column: California Has a History of Racist Lynchings Too. Ignoring That Fact is Mass Delusion*, Los Angeles Times, May 10, 2021 (citing the work of artist Ken Gonzales-Day).

¹⁴⁰ David Garland, *Penal Excess and Surplus Meaning: Public Torture Lynchings in Twentieth-Century America*, 39 L. and Soc. Rev. 793, 810–820 (2005).

¹⁴¹ Death Penalty Information Center, *Enduring Justice: The Persistence of Racial Discrimination in the U.S. Death Penalty*, 12 (2020).

¹⁴² *Gregg*, 428 U.S. 153, 183 (1976) (joint opinion of Justices Stewart, Powell and Stevens).

However, the legal process considered by Justice Stewart was often markedly different for people of color charged with capital offenses.¹⁴³ Death sentences imposed against people of color after expedited criminal processes have been dubbed “legal lynching” by some experts.¹⁴⁴

Against this historical backdrop, the United States Supreme Court considered the various challenges to capital punishment in the 1950s through the 1970s.¹⁴⁵ The constitutional challenges often explicitly alleged some form of racism as their basis, but the Court never directly addressed the death penalty’s racialized history.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, in 1987, the Court acknowledged that the death penalty may be administered in a racially-biased manner but nevertheless upheld the practice unless it could be proven that lawmakers or prosecutors explicitly intended to impose the death penalty in a discriminatory way.¹⁴⁷

B. California data.

Sherod Thaxton, Professor of Law at UCLA School of Law, told the Committee that the studies about racial bias in the administration of the death penalty are remarkably consistent across time periods and research designs and show a consistent theme: race often determines when the death penalty is sought and when it is imposed.¹⁴⁸

Disparities based on race of victim

Extensive research has shown that the race of the victim impacts who is sentenced to death in California. Newly-released studies focus on death cases from 2002 or earlier – a time frame that accounts for most people currently on death row.¹⁴⁹

The most recent research examined murder and manslaughter convictions from 1978–2002.¹⁵⁰ It found that people accused of killing at least one white victim were more likely to be charged with one or more special circumstances than those accused of killing non-white victims.¹⁵¹ Additionally, people accused of killing at least one white victim were more likely to be sentenced to death than those accused of killing non-white victims.¹⁵²

In addition to this most recent research, several previous studies conducted in various California jurisdictions over a broad range of years have made similar findings:

- In a statewide study of death sentences imposed in California in the 1990s, researchers found that Black and Latinx defendants who kill white victims were more likely to be sentenced to death than those who kill Black or Latinx victims.¹⁵³
- In a study of capital cases in Los Angeles County from 1990–1994, researchers found that “defendants accused of killing White victims are more likely to be charged with a death-eligible offense than those accused of killing minority victims.”¹⁵⁴
- In a study on capital charging in San Diego County from 1978–1993, researchers found that the District Attorney was more likely to seek the death penalty when Black and Latinx defendants were alleged to have killed white victims.¹⁵⁵
- A study of charging practices in San Joaquin County from 1977–1986 found that the likelihood of being charged with a special circumstance for defendants

¹⁴³ Carol S. Steiker and Jordan M. Steiker, *The American Death Penalty and the (In)visibility of Race*, 82 *Univ. Chicago L.Rev.* 243, 251–52 (2015).

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* at 244.

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*; Carol S. Steiker and Jordan M. Steiker, *Courting Death*, 78–115 (2016).

¹⁴⁷ *McCleskey v. Kemp*, 481 U.S. 279, 319 (1987) (“The Constitution does not require that a State eliminate any demonstrable disparity that correlates with a potentially irrelevant factor in order to operate a criminal justice system that includes capital punishment.”).

¹⁴⁸ Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 2, 0:03:13–0:04:46.

¹⁴⁹ Analysis of data provided by CDCR Office of Research shows that 79% of the people on death row have an offense committed before 2003, and 64% of people on death row were sentenced to death before 2003.

¹⁵⁰ This research has not yet been finalized. See Letter of Catherine M. Grosso, Jeffrey Fagan, and Michael Laurence to Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, March 22, 2021. The letter is available on the Committee’s website as Exhibit J in the Second Supplement to Memorandum 2021-04.

¹⁵¹ *Id.* at 2–3.

¹⁵² *Id.*

¹⁵³ Glenn L. Pierce and Michael L. Radelet, *The Impact of Legally Inappropriate Factors on Death Sentencing for California Homicides, 1990–1999*, 46 *Santa Clara L.Rev.* 1, 19–20 (2005).

¹⁵⁴ Nick Petersen, *Examining the Sources of Racial Bias in Potentially Capital Cases: A Case Study of Police and Prosecutorial Discretion*, 7(1) *Race & Justice* 7, 23 (2016).

¹⁵⁵ Steven F. Shatz, Glenn L. Pierce, and Michael L. Radelet, *Race, Ethnicity, and the Death Penalty in San Diego County: The Predictable Consequences of Excessive Discretion*, 51 *Colum. Hum. Rts. L.Rev.* 1070, 1095–1096 (2020).

in cases with a Black victim was one-fifth the likelihood in cases with a white victim.¹⁵⁶ In cases with Latinx victims, the likelihood was one-twentieth of that for cases with white victims.¹⁵⁷

Stephen Shatz, University of San Francisco professor emeritus, told the Committee that the findings of the several studies delivers a clear message: “white lives matter, Black lives and Latinx lives, not so much. And white lives matter most when the person who took the white life is a Black.”¹⁵⁸

Disparities based on race of defendant

A major study published in 2019 examined thousands of cases from 1978–2002 and, after controlling for level of culpability, victim race and offense year, found that some special circumstances were disproportionately applied by race or ethnicity of the defendant.¹⁵⁹ In particular, the special circumstances of lying in wait, robbery/burglary felony-murder, drive-by-shooting and gang membership were more likely to be found or present in cases with Black or Latinx defendants.¹⁶⁰ According to the authors, the research findings demonstrate that racial and ethnic stereotypes directed which type of murders were labelled as especially egregious.¹⁶¹ Thus, these special circumstances appear to “codify rather than ameliorate the harmful racial stereotypes that are endemic to our criminal justice system.”¹⁶²

While the research described above does not consider cases past 2002, current data on racial disparities suggests that race still plays a role in how the death penalty is administered in California. While further analysis would need to be conducted to draw a causal link between race and the imposition of a death sentence, this raw data presents troubling trends:

- Despite accounting for only 6.5% of California’s population, over one third of people on death row in the state are Black.¹⁶³
- While Latinx people accounted for less than half of homicide arrests in the state between 2010 and 2020, all 8 of the people sentenced to death in the state in 2018 and 2019 were Latinx.¹⁶⁴ In 2020, 3 of the 5 people sentenced to death in California were Latinx.¹⁶⁵

Data from 2010–2020 for the five counties that imposed the most new death sentences¹⁶⁶ is also concerning:

- In Los Angeles County, 95% of people sentenced to death were people of color. Black people made up 9% of the county population during this time but accounted for 43% of the 40 new death sentences. Of the 223 people on death row who were convicted in Los Angeles County, 49% are Black, 28% are Latinx and 15% are white.
- In Riverside County, 86% of people sentenced to death were people of color. Black people made up 7% of the county population during this time but accounted for 26% of the 42 new death sentences. Of the 88 people on death row who were sentenced in Riverside County, 76% are people of color.

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Lee, *Hispanics And The Death Penalty: Discriminatory Charging Practices in San Joaquin County, California*, 35 J. Crim. Justice 17, 21 (2007).

¹⁵⁷ *Id.*

¹⁵⁸ Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 2, 0:20:14–0:20:38.

¹⁵⁹ Catherine M. Grosso, et al., *Death by Stereotype: Race, Ethnicity, and California’s Failure to Implement Furman’s Narrowing Requirement*, 66 UCLA L.Rev. 1394, 1441 (2019).

¹⁶⁰ *Id.* at 1433–35. The study also found that white defendants were disproportionately likely to face “torture” special circumstances. *Id.* at 1426–1435.

¹⁶¹ *Id.* at 1440–1442.

¹⁶² *Id.*

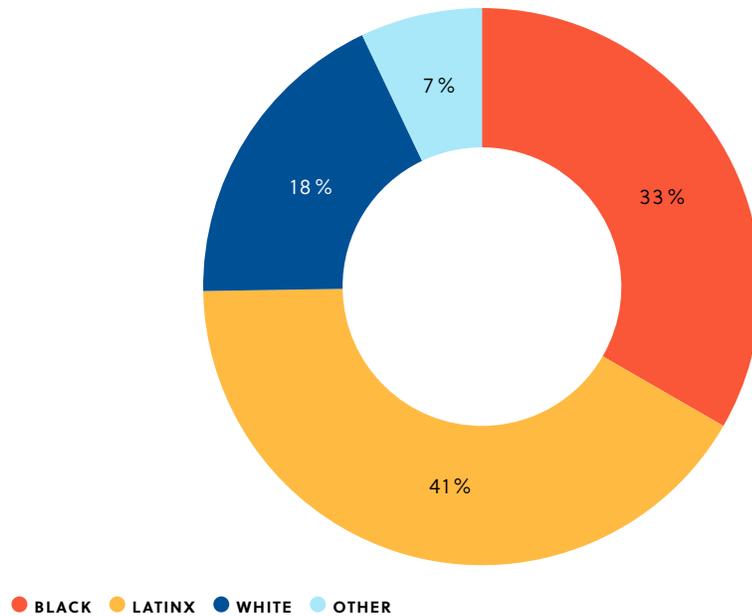
¹⁶³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Quick Facts California* (2019); death row information is analysis of data from CDCR Office of Research and is as of September 2021

¹⁶⁴ Arrest data is from the California Department of Justice’s *Homicide in California* reports from 2010–2020, Table 31; California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California* reports for 2018 and 2019, Table 36, has death sentence data.

¹⁶⁵ California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California* 2020, Table 36.

¹⁶⁶ The data below about imposed death sentences is taken from the California Department of Justice’s *Homicide in California* reports from 2010–2020, Table 36. Demographic data of the death row population was provided by CDCR Office of Research and is as of September 2021. If someone was sentenced to death in two different counties, they are counted once in each county. County population data is from the U.S. Census Bureau.

FIGURE 4: NEW DEATH SENTENCES IMPOSED IN CALIFORNIA BY RACE OF DEFENDANT (2010–2020)



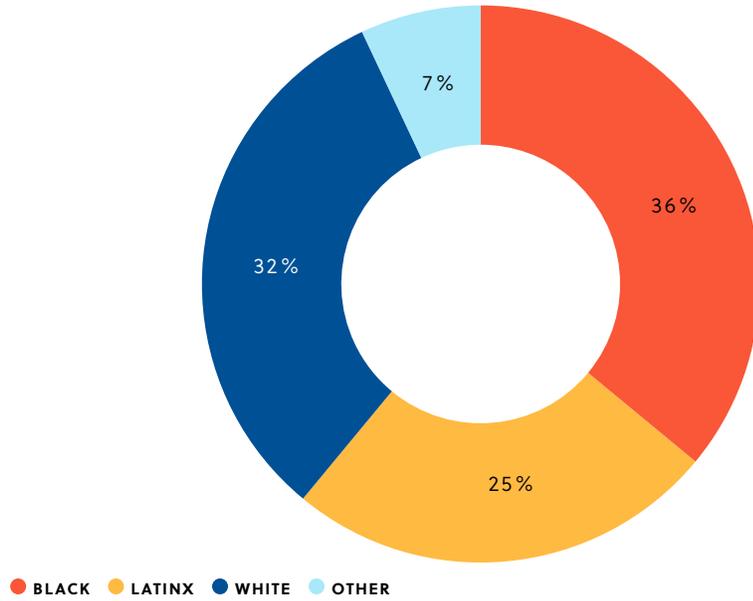
Source: California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California* reports from 2010–2020, Table 36.

- In Orange County, 77% of the people sentenced to death were people of color. Black people made up 2% of the county population during this time but accounted for 31% of the 13 new death sentences. From 2010–2015, Orange County’s capital sentencing rate was 5.4 times the rest of the state per 100 homicides.¹⁶⁷ During the same time, 90% of the individuals sentenced to death in the county were people of color.¹⁶⁸ Of the 60 people on death row who were sentenced in Orange County, 62% are people of color.
- In Kern County, 63% of people sentenced to death were people of color. Black people made up 6% of the county population during this time but they accounted for 25% of the 8 new death sentences. Of the 27 people currently on death row who were sentenced in Kern County, 48% are people of color.
- In San Bernardino County, 50% of people sentenced to death were people of color. Black people made up 9% of the county population during this time but accounted for 38% of the 8 new death sentences. Of the 39 people on death row who were sentenced in San Bernardino County, 62% are people of color.

¹⁶⁷ Fair Punishment Project, *Too Broken to Fix Part II: An In-depth Look at America’s Outlier Death Penalty Counties*, 39 (2016).

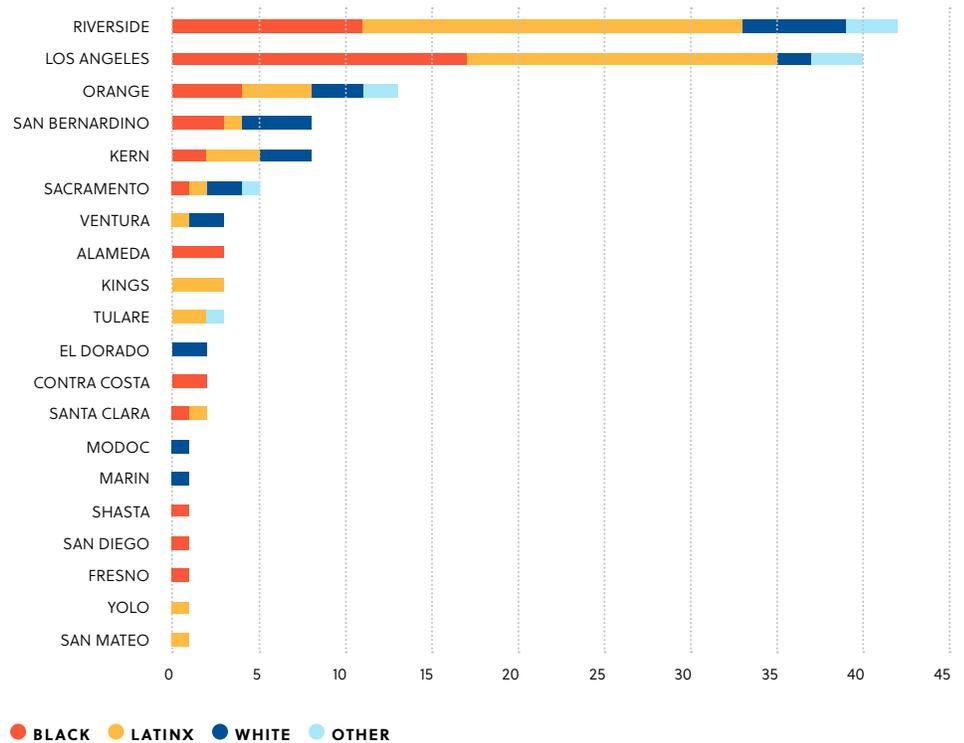
¹⁶⁸ *Id.* at 43.

FIGURE 5: RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF CALIFORNIA'S DEATH ROW



Source: Analysis of data provided by CDCR Office of Research.

FIGURE 6: DEMOGRAPHICS OF NEW DEATH SENTENCES IMPOSED IN CALIFORNIA BY COUNTY (2010–2020)



Source: California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California* reports from 2010–2020, Table 36.

In addition, from 2010–2020 only 20 of California’s counties imposed any new death sentences. The vast majority – 15 of the 20 – of these counties generated 3 or less new death sentences over this time. In 10 of the counties where death sentences were infrequent, they were imposed exclusively on people of color:

- Alameda County sentenced 3 people to death. All of them were Black.
- Kings County sentenced 3 people to death. All of them were Latinx.
- Tulare County sentenced 3 people to death. Two were Latinx and 1 was Black.
- Santa Clara County sentenced 2 people to death. One was Latinx and the other was Black.¹⁶⁹
- Contra Costa County sentenced 2 people to death. Both were Black.
- Five counties each sentenced a single person to death and that person was either Black or Latinx. In Fresno, San Diego and Shasta counties, the person was Black. In San Mateo and Yolo counties, the person was Latinx.

C. Sources of bias.

Like other areas of the criminal legal system, many sources contribute to racially biased practices and outcomes in the context of the death penalty. Racial disparities in policing¹⁷⁰ and the broad discretion afforded prosecutors in determining when to seek the death penalty¹⁷¹ have been cited as potential sources. And Dr. George Woods, president of the International Academy of Law and Mental Health, told the Committee that social factors that have been found to result in disproportionately negative health outcomes for people of color – such as chronic disease and lack of access to adequate medical treatment – also define the population of capital defendants.¹⁷²

While each of these sources contribute to the disparate racial outcomes, the jury selection process for capital offenses deserves special consideration. Though both the California and United States Supreme Courts have adopted rules to prevent racial bias from impacting who serves on a jury,¹⁷³ juries in California continue to be disproportionately white.¹⁷⁴

This is especially true in capital cases because of the process of “death qualification,” where potential jurors can be dismissed if they express reservations about the death penalty.¹⁷⁵ Unlike an ordinary criminal trial, potential jurors in capital cases are allowed to be questioned about their attitudes toward the death penalty. If a juror expresses an opinion against the death penalty that can “substantially impair” their ability to consider imposing a death sentence, they are excluded from serving.¹⁷⁶ This process has been shown to disproportionately exclude Black people because they are more likely to be opposed to the death penalty than are white people.¹⁷⁷ Even when potential jurors survive the death qualification process, prosecutors can use peremptory challenges to exclude those who were indecisive about the penalty.¹⁷⁸

Professor Semel told the Committee that the result of this process “is that men and women whose views about race, poverty, marginalization, adversity, and, yes, mercy, [which] have been informed by their history and experience, are disproportionately

¹⁶⁹ These death sentences were imposed in 2010 and 2011.

¹⁷⁰ According to researchers, homicides in Los Angeles involving minority victims are less likely to be solved. Catherine Lee, *The Value Of Life In Death: Multiple Regression And Event History Analysis Of Homicide Clearance In Los Angeles County*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 33, 527–534 (2005). See also Nick Petersen, *Neighbourhood Context And Unsolved Murders: The Social Ecology Of Homicide Investigations*, *Policing and Society* 27:4, 372–392 (2015). This may reflect a national trend: in 2018, the Washington Post analyzed homicide arrest data from 52 large cities across the U.S., including several in California, and found that in more than 18,600 of the approximately 26,000 unsolved cases, the victim was Black. Lowery, et al., *Murder with Impunity: An Unequal Justice*, *The Washington Post*, July 25, 2018.

¹⁷¹ Prosecutors can choose from a list of 22 different “special circumstances” that make a first-degree murder eligible for the death penalty, including “felony-murder” which lists 13 different felonies that can serve as the predicate for a capital sentence even if the death was accidental. Penal Code § 190.2. Though Committee staff have been unable to find published practices or policies on the death penalty from any District Attorney office throughout the state, staff was able to determine that a number of counties have standing death penalty committees that inform the decision of whether the death penalty should be sought.

¹⁷² Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 2, 0:31:45–0:37:00.

¹⁷³ *People v. Wheeler*, 22 Cal. 3d 258 (1978); *Batson v. Kentucky*, 476 U.S. 79 (1986).

¹⁷⁴ Berkeley Law Death Penalty Clinic, *Whitewashing the Jury Box: How California Perpetuates the Discriminatory Exclusion of Black and Latinx Jurors*, 3–5 (2020). See also Equal Justice Initiative, *Race and the Jury: Illegal Racial Discrimination in Jury Selection* (2021) (additional historical and national examples).

¹⁷⁵ *Id.* at 40–41.

¹⁷⁶ Mona Lynch and Craig Haney, *Death Qualification in Black and White: Racialized Decision Making and Death-Qualified Jurors*, 40 *Law & Pol’y* 148 (2018).

¹⁷⁷ James D. Unnever, Francis T. Cullen, and Cheryl Lero Jonson, *Race, Racism, and Support for Capital Punishment*, 37 *Crime & Just.* 45, 54 (2008); See also Mona Lynch and Craig Haney, *Death Qualification in Black and White: Racialized Decision Making and Death-Qualified Jurors*, 40 *Law & Pol’y* 148, 153–159 (2018).

¹⁷⁸ Mona Lynch and Craig Haney, *Death Qualification in Black and White: Racialized Decision Making and Death-Qualified Jurors*, 40 *Law & Pol’y* 148, 166 (2018).

removed from the capital jury, which is no longer heterogeneous, diverse, or representative of a fair cross-section of our community.”¹⁷⁹

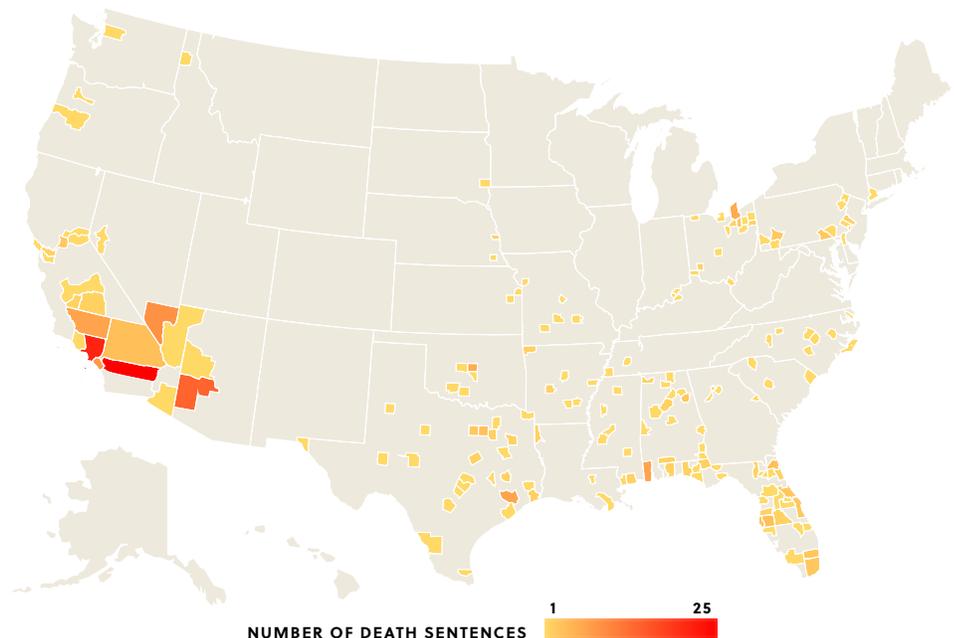
Additionally, penalty phase instructions are “notoriously difficult for jurors to understand and apply,”¹⁸⁰ and research has shown that most jurors do not understand the instructions.¹⁸¹ When jurors do not fully comprehend the instructions, they are more likely to allow bias to impact their decisions.¹⁸² Indeed, researchers have found that jurors with the poorest comprehension of the instructions were the most prone to deciding based on racial bias.¹⁸³

VI. CALIFORNIA'S DEATH PENALTY IS GEOGRAPHICALLY BIASED

Geographic bias also determines who is sentenced to death in California.¹⁸⁴ As Professor Shatz told the Committee, geographical disparities occur in California because “[p]rosecutors have virtually unlimited discretion” when charging special circumstances and seeking death.¹⁸⁵

As a result, most death judgments in California are imposed in a handful of California’s 58 counties. From 2015–2020, six counties imposed 89% of the death sentences in the state, and just two of these counties – Los Angeles and Riverside – imposed 61% of all death sentences in California.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, death sentences imposed in five counties account for 64% of all people currently on death row, despite comprising less than half of California’s population.¹⁸⁷

FIGURE 7: DEATH SENTENCES IMPOSED IN THE UNITED STATES BY COUNTY (2013–2019)



¹⁷⁹ Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 2, 0:28:21–0:28:42.

¹⁸⁰ Mona Lynch and Craig Haney, *Mapping the Racial Bias of the White Male Capital Juror: Jury Composition and the “Empathic Divide,”* 45 *Law & Soc. Rev.* 69, 74 (2011).

¹⁸¹ Mona Lynch and Craig Haney, *Capital Jury Deliberation: Effects on Death Sentencing, Comprehension, and Discrimination,* 33 *Law & Hum. Behav.* 481, 482 (2009).

¹⁸² Mona Lynch and Craig Haney, *Mapping the Racial Bias of the White Male Capital Juror: Jury Composition and the “Empathic Divide,”* 45 *Law & Soc. Rev.* 69, 74 (2011).

¹⁸³ Mona Lynch and Craig Haney, *Discrimination and Instructional Comprehension: Guided Discretion, Racial Bias, and the Death Penalty,* 24 *Law & Hum. Behav.* 337, 344–45 (2000).

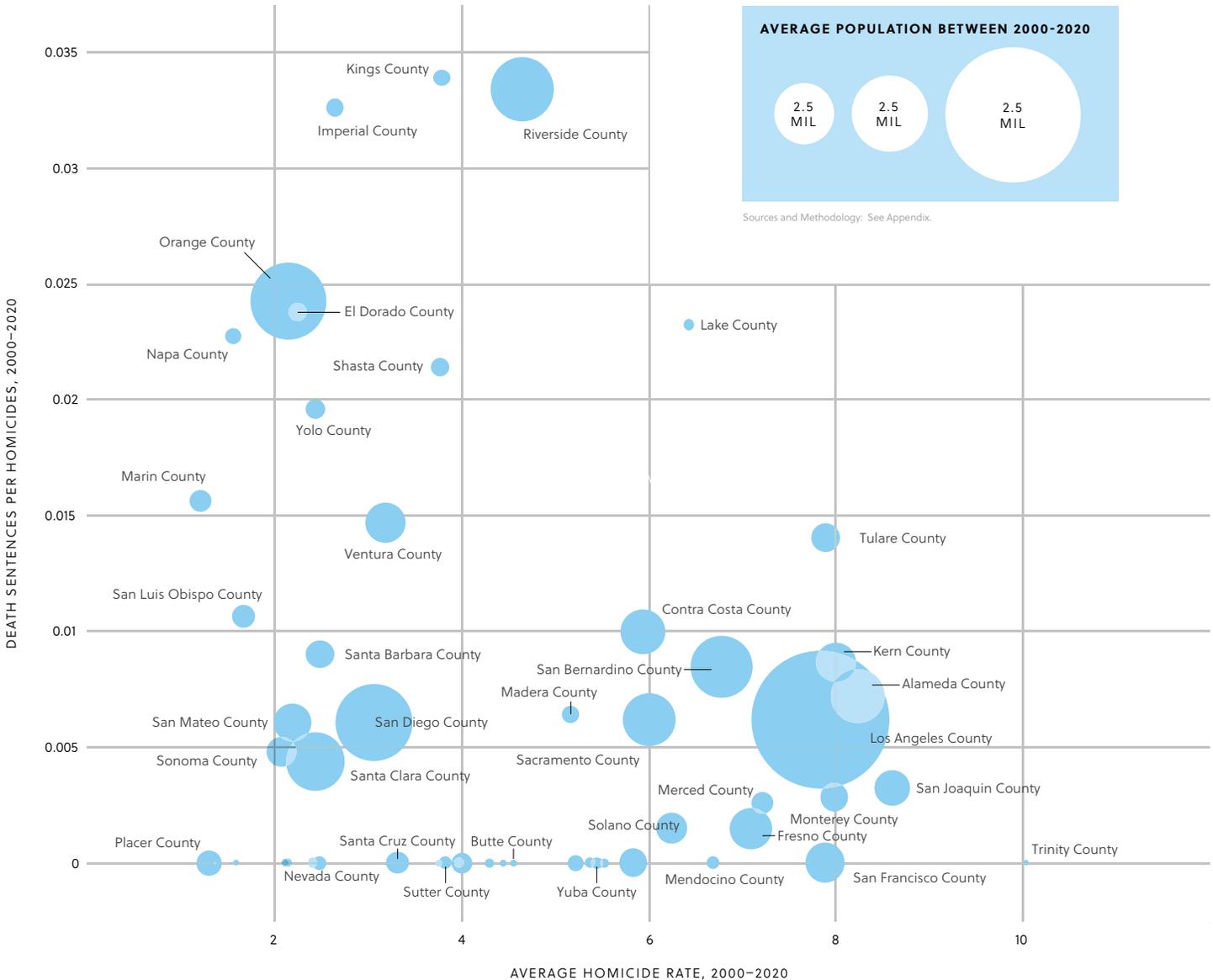
¹⁸⁴ ACLU of Northern California, *Death by Geography: A County by County Analysis of the Road to Execution in California,* 3 (2009).

¹⁸⁵ Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 2, 0:13:52–0:14:00.

¹⁸⁶ California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California* reports from 2015–2020, Table 36. The counties are Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, Kern, San Bernardino and Tulare.

¹⁸⁷ Analysis of data provided by CDCR Office of Research. The counties are Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, Alameda, and San Bernardino. Population data taken from U.S. Census Bureau, Quick Facts California and is as of July 1, 2019.

FIGURE 8: DEATH PENALTY USAGE RATE COMPARED TO HOMICIDE RATE



One California county – Riverside – sentences people to death so frequently that it has become a national outlier. In 2015, Riverside County sentenced more people to death than every other state in the country, except for Florida and California itself.¹⁸⁸ In 2017, three counties accounted for 31% of new death sentences in the entire United States: Clark County in Nevada, Maricopa County in Arizona and Riverside County.¹⁸⁹ In 2020, Riverside County was responsible for three of the five death sentences in California.¹⁹⁰

The geographic disparities in death sentencing cannot be explained by some counties having higher homicide rates. As Figure 8 shows, counties with high homicide rates are not the ones that use the death penalty the most, and counties with very similar homicide rates differ in their usage of the death penalty. For example, Santa Clara County and Orange County both have homicide rates around 2.5 per 100,000

188 Fair Punishment Project, *Too Broken to Fix: Part I: An In-Depth Look at America's Outlier Death Penalty Counties*, 31 (2016).

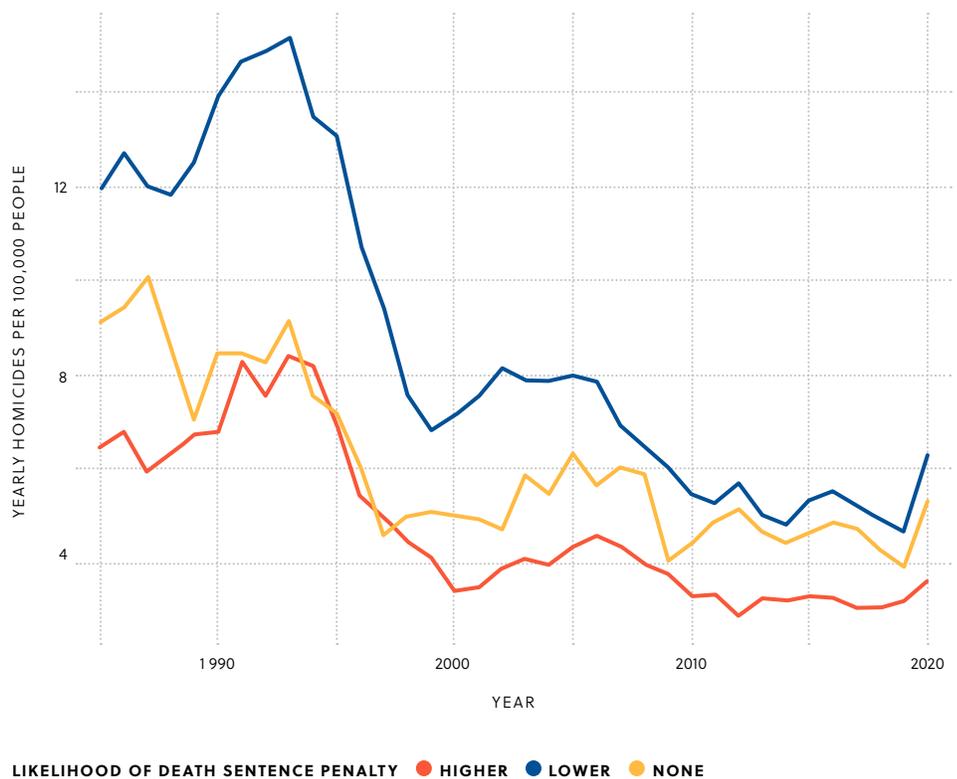
189 Death Penalty Information Center, *DPIC Year End Report: New Death Sentences Demonstrate Increasing Geographic Isolation*, Dec. 15, 2017.

190 Analysis of data provided by CDCR Office of Research.

residents but have varied greatly in their application of the death penalty over the past two decades.

As shown in Figure 9, homicide rates have fallen at similar rates over the past 30 years both in counties that use the death penalty more frequently than others and in counties that do not use it all.

FIGURE 9: CHANGES IN HOMICIDE RATES GROUPED BY DEATH PENALTY USAGE



While a county’s homicide rate does not explain its death penalty usage, other factors not related to crime may. Unsurprisingly, there is a correlation between support for the death penalty in a county and usage. In counties where the population more heavily favors the death penalty, more people are sentenced to death per homicide. As shown in Figure 10, California counties with a higher percentage of votes against abolishing the death penalty – “No” votes on Proposition 62 in 2016 – have a higher rate of death penalty sentences per homicide.

FIGURE 10: SUPPORT FOR PROPOSITION 62 AND DEATH SENTENCES



AVERAGE POPULATION BETWEEN 2000-2020 ● 2.5 MILLION ● 5 MILLION ● 7.5 MILLION

Sources and Methodology: See Appendix.

VII. CALIFORNIA HAS SENTENCED PEOPLE WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS, PEOPLE WITH HISTORIES OF TRAUMATIC ABUSE, AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO DEATH

The modern death penalty is supposed to be imposed only on people “whose extreme culpability makes them the most deserving of execution.”¹⁹¹ The United States Supreme Court has categorically excluded people with intellectual disabilities and people who committed their offenses before the age of 18 from death eligibility,¹⁹² finding that their execution violated the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment.

But many people remain on California’s death row despite having been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities and many others have cognitive characteristics and deficits comparable to those of people with intellectual disabilities and juveniles:

- At least 60 people on death row have presented evidence in court filings that they are intellectually disabled.¹⁹³ Since half of the people on death row do not have attorneys to present their habeas claims,¹⁹⁴ this number likely underrepresents the scope of the problem. To date, at least 14 people in California have had their death sentence removed because of intellectual disabilities.¹⁹⁵
- The clinical definition of “intellectual disability” is also narrow, only applying to people who show evidence of the disability at a young age, and excluding people who have suffered traumatic brain injury (TBI) or dementia later in life.¹⁹⁶ The American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, National Alliance of the Mentally Ill, and American Bar Association’s Task Force on Mental Disability and the Death Penalty all adopted recommendations that the categorical exclusion from the death penalty for people with intellectual disabilities should be extended to include people with similar intellectual functioning caused by TBI and dementia.¹⁹⁷
- The United States Supreme Court has also forbidden executing people who are “incompetent,” meaning they do not understand the nature of or reasons for their execution.¹⁹⁸ California’s Attorney General has recognized two people on death row as “permanently incompetent,” individuals whose intellectual functioning or psychological conditions have deteriorated (such as from age-related dementia) so dramatically during their incarceration that they have little likelihood of regaining competency.¹⁹⁹ In seven other cases, the Attorney General has agreed that the issue of someone’s permanent incompetence to be executed should be resolved because it may mean that the person could never be executed.²⁰⁰ This number is likely to increase with time as the death row population continues to age. There is no statute or clear legal process for resentencing these individuals to remove them from death row, creating confusion in the Superior Courts about how to proceed.
- At least one-third of death row is being treated for severe mental illness, according to the attorneys in a class action case about mental health treatment in California’s prisons.²⁰¹ The American Bar Association, the American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, National Alliance on Mental Illness, and Mental Health America have all recommended prohibiting the execution of those with severe mental illness, agreeing with the statement of the ABA that, as with juveniles and people with

191 *Kennedy v. Louisiana*, 554 U.S. 407, 420 (2008) (citation omitted).

192 *Atkins v. Virginia*, 536 U.S. 304 (2002) (intellectual disability); *Roper v. Simmons*, 543 U.S. 551 (2005) (youth).

193 Information provided by Habeas Corpus Resource Center.

194 HCRC Report at 10.

195 *In re Calvin Coleman*, Sonoma County Superior Court Case No. SCR-10143; *In re Jose Arnaldo Rodriguez*, San Mateo County Superior Court Case No. SC-18140-01; *In re David Fierro*, Riverside County Superior Court Case No. RIC-440182; *In re George Smithey*, Calaveras County Superior Court Case No. 2639; *In re Robert Young*, Alameda County Superior Court Case No. 100819; *In re Robert Lewis*, 4 Cal.5th 1195 (2018); *In re Walter Cook*, San Mateo Superior Court Case No. SC31145; *In re Clarence Ray*, Kern County Case No. SC35488A; *In re Donald Griffin*, Fresno County Superior Court Case No. 08-CRWR-679178; *In re Noel Jackson*, Riverside County Superior Court Case No. RIC-475367; *In re Anthony Townsel*, Madera County Superior Court Case No. 8926; *In re Michael Huggins*, Alameda Superior Court Case No. H9225; *In re Stanley Davis*, Los Angeles County Superior Court Case No. A093076; *In re Douglas Kelly*, Los Angeles County Superior Court Case No. LA015339.

196 Cal. Pen. Code § 1376(a)(1) (the disability must have “manifested before the end of the developmental period”).

197 ABA Task Force on Mental Disability and the Death Penalty, *Recommendation and Report on the Death Penalty and Persons with Mental Disabilities*, 30 Mental & Physical Disability L.Rep. 668, 669, Sept.–Oct. 2006.

198 *Ford v. Wainwright*, 477 U.S. 399 (1986).

199 *In re Jeffrey Jones*, Sacramento Superior Court Case No.19HC00474 (death sentence vacated and resentenced to life without parole on June 7, 2021); *In re Billy Riggs*, Riverside Superior Court Case No. RIC1821277 (death sentence vacated on May 10, 2021).

200 *In re Robert Carrasco*, Los Angeles Superior Court Case No. LA BAI09453; *In re McPeters*, California Supreme Court Case No. S2269918; *In re Antonio Espinoza*, San Joaquin County Superior Court Case No. STK-CR-FE-1983-0000031; *In re David Welch*, Alameda County Superior Court Case No. HC 103289-1; *In re Justin Merriman*, Ventura County Superior Court Case No. CR46564; *In re Ronald Bell*, California Supreme Court Case No. S244042; and *In re Darren Stanley*, Alameda County Superior Court Case No. HC103289-1. Ronald Bell died while legal proceedings remained pending. CDCR, News Release: *Condemned Inmate Ronald Bell Dies*, March 11, 2019.

201 As of February 2021, 153 are in treatment for “serious mental disorders,” including schizophrenia, psychotic disorders and bipolar disorder; 71 more are being treated for “acute onset or significant decompensation, including delusional thinking, hallucinations, and vegetative affect,” and 18 are receiving inpatient care due to “acute exacerbation of a chronic major mental illness, marked impairment, and dysfunction in most areas.” Communication with Rosen Bien Galvan & Grunfeld LLP, attorneys representing plaintiffs in *Coleman v. Newsom*, March 1, 2021. Definitions from Stanford Justice Advocacy Project, *The Prevalence and Severity Of Mental Illness Among California Prisoners On The Rise* (2017).

intellectual disabilities, “this population simply does not have the requisite moral culpability.”²⁰²

- Many people on California’s death row experienced chronic violence and trauma as children, including extreme levels of physical and sexual abuse.²⁰³ These traumatic backgrounds are not unique to California’s death row.²⁰⁴ Research, including a recent report from the California Surgeon General, has demonstrated that such “Adverse Childhood Experiences” can cause neurological, psychological and hormonal changes linked to lawbreaking and violent behaviors.²⁰⁵
- In California, 45% of the people on death row – 316 people – were 25 or younger at the time of their offense²⁰⁶ and 166 of them were 21 or younger.²⁰⁷ Forty-two were only 18 years old.²⁰⁸

The same reasons that forbid executing people who were under 18 at the time of their offense apply to other young people.²⁰⁹ Advances in neuroscience have demonstrated that parts of the brain critical to decision-making, reward-seeking and impulse-control continue developing at least through the early 20s.²¹⁰ Sentencing young adults to the death penalty is not consistent with the principal that only those with “extreme culpability” can be executed.²¹¹

²⁰² ABA Task Force on Mental Disability and the Death Penalty, *Recommendation and Report on the Death Penalty and Persons with Mental Disabilities*, 30 *Mental & Physical Disability L.Rep.* at 669. Ohio recently adopted a statute based on these recommendations, excluding individuals with severe mental illness from being sentenced to death. See Death Penalty Information Center, *Ohio Bars Death Penalty for People with Severe Mental Illness*, Jan 11, 2021. The California Supreme Court has consistently rejected any prohibition on sentencing the severely mentally ill to death. See, e.g., *People v. Steskal*, 485 P.3d 1, 33–37 (2021).

²⁰³ See *California’s Broken Death Penalty* at 44–46 (collecting cases). See also, e.g., *In re Lucas* 16 Cal.Rptr.3d 331, 335, 342, 351–59 (2004) (describing “the severe emotional and physical abuse suffered by petitioner as a preschooler and young child”).

²⁰⁴ See, e.g., Death Penalty Information Center, *The Death Penalty in 2020: Year End Report*, 20 (Dec. 2020); Death Penalty Information Center, *The Death Penalty in 2019: Year End Report*, 16 (Dec. 2019); Death Penalty Information Center, *The Death Penalty in 2018: Year End Report*, 12 (Dec. 2018); Robert Dunham, *INSIGHT: Vast Majority on Federal Death Row Have Significant Impairments*, *Bloomberg Law*, July 8, 2020; Maurice Chammah and Keri Blakinger, *What Lisa Montgomery Has in Common With Many on Death Row: Extensive Trauma*, *The Marshall Project* (Jan. 8, 2021).

²⁰⁵ Office of the Surgeon General, *Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General’s Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health* (2020).

²⁰⁶ Analysis of data provided by CDCR Office of Research in September 2021.

²⁰⁷ *Id.*

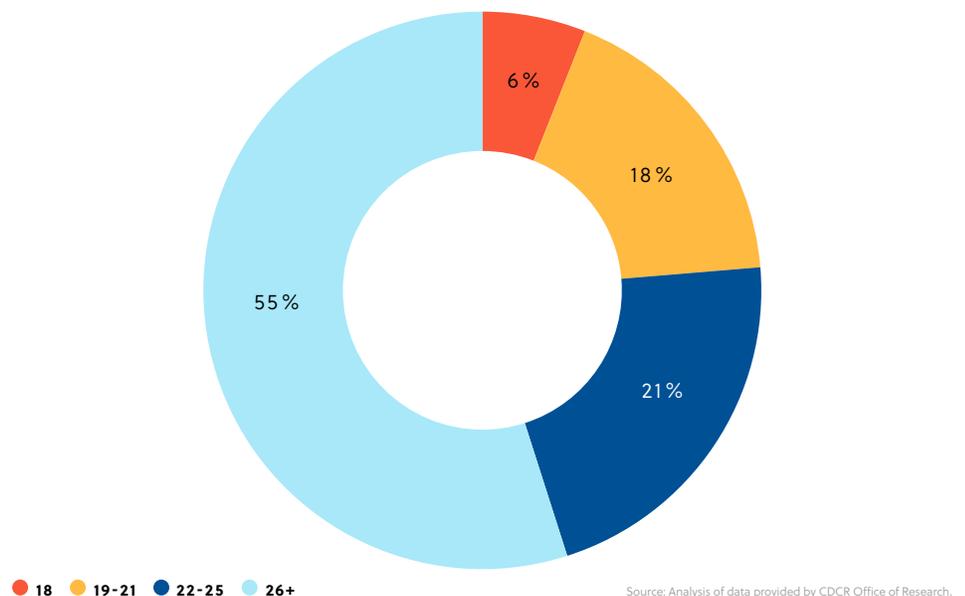
²⁰⁸ *Id.*

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth P. Shulman and Elizabeth Cauffman, *Deciding in the Dark: Age Differences in Intuitive Risk Judgment*, 50 *Developmental Psychology* 167, 172–173 (2014).

²¹⁰ See, e.g., Laurence Steinberg, *Adolescent Brain Science and Juvenile Justice Policymaking* 23(4) *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 410, 413–414 (2017); Sara B. Johnson, Robert W. Blum, and Jay N. Giedd, *Adolescent Maturity and the Brain: The Promise and Pitfalls of Neuroscience Research in Adolescent Health Policy*, 45 *Journal of Adolescent Health* 216, 217–18 (2009).

²¹¹ See *Simmons*, 543 U.S. at 571 (“Retribution is not proportional if the law’s most severe penalty is imposed on one whose culpability or blameworthiness is diminished, to a substantial degree, by reason of youth and immaturity.”). The Legislature has recognized that young people have extraordinary capacity for change and given certain young adults earlier chances to be released from prison, but these reforms exclude people sentenced to death or life without parole as young adults. See Penal Code § 3051(h).

FIGURE 11: DEATH ROW POPULATION BY AGE AT OFFENSE



Racial disparities are especially pronounced in young people sentenced to death. While 68% of all people on death row are people of color, the percentage jumps to 77% for people who were 25 or younger at the time of their offense, and to 86% for people who were 18 at the time of their offense.²¹²

FIGURE 12: RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF PEOPLE ON DEATH ROW WHO WERE 25 OR YOUNGER AT THE TIME OF THEIR OFFENSE

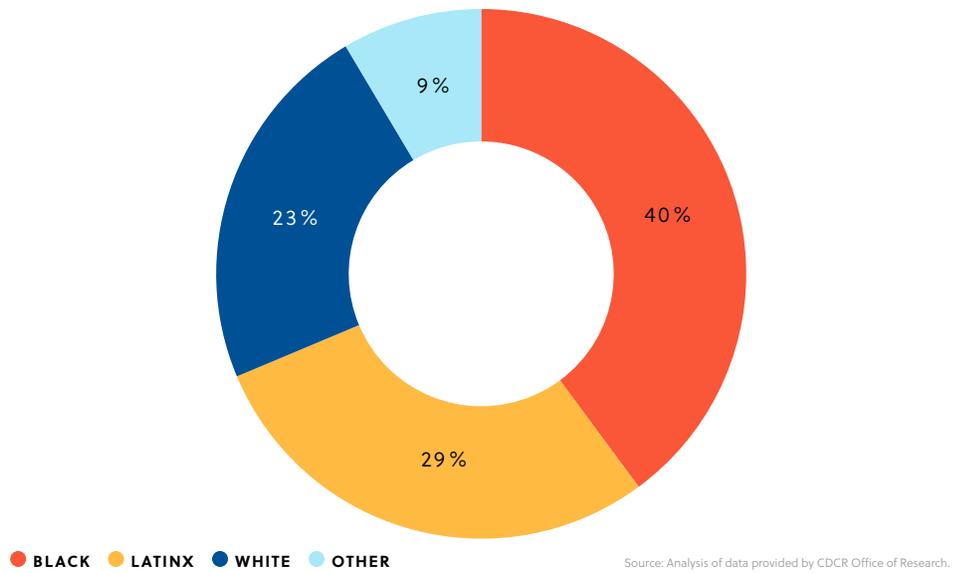
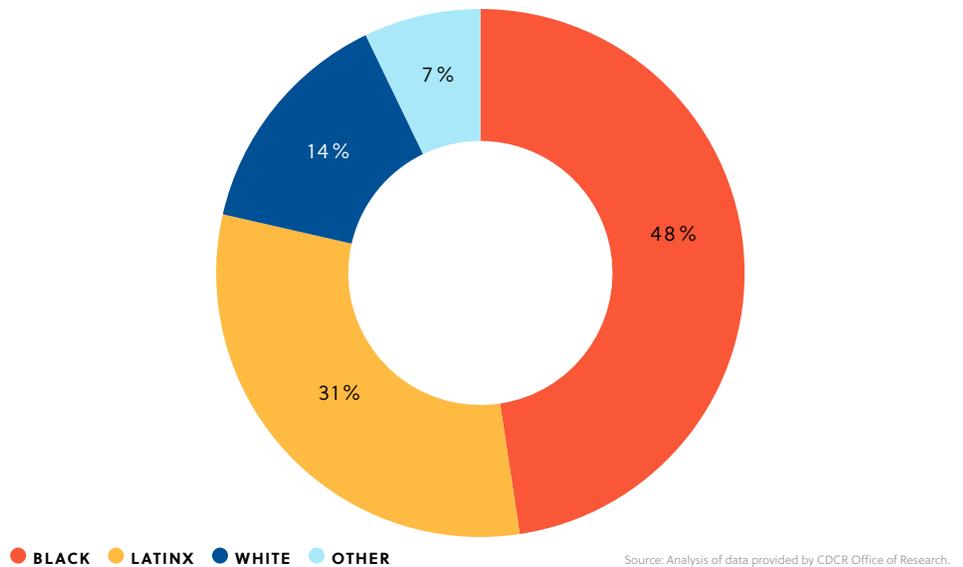


FIGURE 13: RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF PEOPLE ON DEATH ROW WHO WERE 18 AT THE TIME OF THEIR OFFENSE



²¹² This data, as well as that used in the following two figures, was provided by CDCR Office of Research in September 2021.

VIII. CALIFORNIA HAS SENTENCED INNOCENT PEOPLE TO DEATH

Five innocent men on death row have been fully exonerated and released since California's reinstatement of the death penalty in 1977.²¹³ All five are people of color. The most recent exoneration was Vincente Benavides Figueroa in 2018.²¹⁴ He was sentenced to death in 1993 for the sexual assault and murder of his girlfriend's 21-month-old daughter.²¹⁵ After 25 years, the California Supreme Court overturned his conviction after the prosecution agreed that the convictions were based on false evidence.²¹⁶ Prosecutors subsequently dropped all charges.²¹⁷

Serious questions have also been raised about the innocence of other people currently on California's death row.²¹⁸ For example, in May 2021, Governor Newsom ordered an independent investigation into the death sentence of Kevin Cooper, who was convicted of four murders in 1983 but maintains that he was framed.²¹⁹ In addition, Sean Kennedy, executive director of the Center for Juvenile Law and Policy at Loyola Law School, told the Committee that the Loyola Project for the Innocent currently has five additional death penalty cases under active investigation with credible, new evidence of innocence and that he expects to see "many more death row exonerations in the future."²²⁰

Nationally, 185 people on death row and 212 people sentenced to life without parole have been exonerated.²²¹ A 2014 study by the National Academy of Sciences estimates that there are many more innocent people on America's death row who have not yet been exonerated.²²²

IX. COSTS AND DYSFUNCTION

The California death penalty costs the state approximately \$150 million per year.²²³ Even with those costs, the state is not spending enough money: people sentenced to death routinely wait decades to be assigned post-conviction lawyers because the state does not pay for more attorneys.²²⁴ According to the calculations of some experts, California has executed 13 people at a cost of \$4 billion.²²⁵ Because of these costs and delays, the former Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court Ronald George diagnosed California's system as "dysfunctional" and called it a "charade."²²⁶

A. Since Proposition 66 in 2016, costs have not decreased.

In 2016, California voters approved Proposition 66, which was promoted as a way to "speed up the death penalty appeals system."²²⁷ Proponents of the proposition argued that swifter executions would save California taxpayers money on "meals, healthcare, privileges and endless legal appeals" for people on death row.²²⁸

But costs and delay have not decreased since the passage of Proposition 66. Costs remain significantly greater at every stage of death penalty litigation. A death penalty trial adds between \$500,000²²⁹ and \$1.2 million²³⁰ to the costs of a murder trial for a number of reasons,²³¹ which have not changed since the passage of Proposition 66.

As described below, state post-conviction proceedings are also time consuming and costly. The Judicial Council of California recently estimated and sought additional annual funding of more than \$18 million to cover Proposition 66 costs.²³² This funding request was not granted.²³³ Federal law also requires that attorneys be appointed to

213 Death Penalty Information Center, *Innocence Database*. A sixth man, Jerry Bigelow, was acquitted of murder after being sentenced to death and is also no longer on death row. See *Bigelow v. Superior Court*, 256 Cal. Rptr. 528, 536 (1989). Because his related convictions for kidnapping and robbery were affirmed, he is not included in some exoneration lists.

214 *In re Figueroa*, 4 Cal.5th 576, 579 (2018).

215 *Id.*

216 *Id.* at 588–89.

217 Death Penalty Information Center, *Vicente Benavides, Sentenced to Death by False Forensics, to Be Freed After 26 Years on Death Row*, April 18, 2018.

218 See Lara Bazelon, *As COVID-19 Ravages California's Death Row, the State's Attorney General Fights to Keep it Packed*, *Slate*, July 27, 2020 (discussing the case of Michael Hill who asserts his innocence). See also David Sheff, *The Buddhist on Death Row: How One Man Found Light in the Darkest Place* (2020) (discussing the life and case of Jarvis Masters, who asserts his innocence).

219 Associated Press, *Gov. Newsom Orders Independent Investigation into Death Row Inmate Kevin Cooper's Murder Conviction*, May 28, 2021.

220 Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 1, 0:28:12–0:29:27.

221 Death Penalty Information Center, *DPIC Adds Eleven Cases to Innocence List, Bringing National Death-Row Exoneration Total to 185*, Feb. 18, 2021; National Registry of Exonerations (detailed view of list of cases, filtered for "life without parole" sentence) (as of August 23, 2021).

222 Samuel R. Gross, et al., *Rate of False Conviction of Criminal Defendants Who Are Sentenced to Death*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, May 20, 2014.

223 Voter Information Guide for 2016, General Election, 81 (2016) (Legislative Analyst's Office analysis of Proposition 62).

224 *HCRC Report* at 4, 14–15 (noting that the Habeas Corpus Resource Center is restricted by law from hiring more than 34 attorneys).

225 Judge Arthur L. Alarcon and Paula M. Mitchell, *Executing the Will of the Voters?: A Roadmap to Mend or End the California Legislature's Multi-Billion Dollar Death Penalty Debacle*, 44 *Loy. L.A. L. REV.* 541 (2011) (Death Penalty Debacle). Committee staff confirmed that Professor Mitchell has updated this estimate, which she cautions is "conservative," to \$6 billion.

226 Claire Cooper, *Predictions And Warnings, Recollections and Observations of Former Chief Justice Ron George*, Sacramento Bee, Nov. 10, 2013.

227 Voter Information Guide for 2016, General Election, 108 (2016) (Argument in Favor of Proposition 66).

228 *Id.* at 109.

229 *CCFAJ Report* at 145.

230 *Death Penalty Debacle* at 574 (discussing the results of a 1993 study). Some death penalty trials are much more costly, including those of Charles Ng (\$10.9 million), Donald Bowcutt (\$5 million), and Scott Peterson (\$3.2 million excluding defense costs since he retained his own counsel).

231 For example, pursuant to Penal Code § 987(d) and *Keenan v. Superior Court*, 31 Cal.3d 424 (1982), two trial defense attorneys are permitted to represent people facing the death penalty. Also, the separate "penalty phase" trial requires supplemental experts and extensive investigation generally unrelated to the "guilt phase" of a death penalty trial. Legislative Analyst's Office, *Proposition 62: Death Penalty*, Initiative Statute (Nov. 8, 2016).

232 Information provided by Judicial Council of California; Judicial Branch Budget Committee Meeting Materials, May 28, 2020. The funding would include additional Superior Court costs for habeas cases, additional court personnel and appointed attorneys in the Courts of Appeal, as well as additional attorney positions with the Habeas Corpus Resource Center.

233 Neither the Governor's proposed budget in January 2021 nor the Budget Act of 2021 (AB 128, SB 128) allotted state funding for this Proposition 66 funding request. See Governor's Proposed Budget, Jan. 2021.

represent people sentenced to death in their federal habeas proceedings, which has been estimated to cost the federal government more than \$775 million for California death penalty cases from the 1970s through 2010.²³⁴

Finally, it costs at least tens of millions of dollars more each year to house people on death row compared to a non-death row prison setting.²³⁵ Though Proposition 66 gave the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation authority to move people off death row, only 64 individuals have been transferred to other prisons pursuant to Proposition 66.²³⁶

B. People on death row wait decades to complete post-conviction review.

A person sentenced to death in California can expect to wait more than 30 years before their case moves through all phases of post-conviction review.²³⁷

While the proponents of Proposition 66 promised to speed up cases by modifying the state habeas process, the average time it takes for a capital case to proceed from a sentence of death to final resolution of habeas proceedings has continued to increase. In 2020, the average time from sentencing to resolution of the state habeas proceedings had increased to 20 years,²³⁸ up from 17 years in 2015,²³⁹ and 12 years in 2008.²⁴⁰ Completing the federal habeas review process adds additional time.²⁴¹

As of December 2020, the average time on death row for the 29 people who have exhausted their appeals was 33.8 years.²⁴² The four people who most recently exhausted all their state and federal appeals took between 29 and 32 years to do so.²⁴³

The main reason for these delays is a lack of qualified attorneys to handle state habeas corpus proceedings. On average, it takes 20 years for state habeas counsel to be appointed after someone is sentenced to death.²⁴⁴ There are 363 death-sentenced people awaiting initial appointment of counsel for state habeas litigation, more than half of all people sentenced to death in California.²⁴⁵ Eighty-five people on death row have been waiting for appointment of habeas counsel for more than 20 years.²⁴⁶

C. Proposition 66 has slowed down post-conviction proceedings.

Despite arguments by proponents of Proposition 66 that the measure would “speed up” death penalty appeals,²⁴⁷ its attempt to set a five-year deadline for completing state appeals was invalidated by the California Supreme Court²⁴⁸ and other changes it made to the law have actually slowed down post-conviction proceedings.

First, by requiring that Superior Courts process habeas cases in the first instance, Proposition 66 created an additional level of review: either side may appeal the habeas decision of the Superior Court and new counsel must then be appointed in the Court of Appeals.²⁴⁹ Because no method of paying new counsel was created with Proposition 66, 19 cases are currently stayed in the Court of Appeal waiting to have habeas counsel appointed.²⁵⁰

Next, under Proposition 66, Superior Courts are now in charge of appointing habeas counsel instead of the California Supreme Court.²⁵¹ But no new habeas cases have been assigned since the passage of Proposition 66 and only three new attorneys have been included in the pool of qualified capital habeas counsel.²⁵² At the end of 2020, the same

234 *Death Penalty Debacle*, at 598–599.

235 Voter Information Guide for 2016, General Election, 81 (2016) (Legislative Analyst’s Office analysis of Proposition 62). See also Judge Arthur L. Alarcon and Paula M. Mitchell, *Costs of Capital Punishment in California: Will Voters Choose Reform This November?*, 46 *Loy. L.A. L. Rev.* 51, 54, n.3 (2012) (discussing study showing at least \$40,000 more per person); CCFJA Report at 146 (\$90,000 per year).

236 Information provided on July 27, 2021, by CDCR Division of Adult Institutions.

237 HCRC Report at 11–13 (noting among other delays that it takes an average of 20 years to appoint counsel for state habeas corpus proceedings, an average of four years for decisions in state habeas corpus cases after briefing is completed, and another 10 years for federal review). See also *California’s Broken Death Penalty* at 58.

238 HCRC Report at 11.

239 *Jones v. Davis*, 806 F.3d 538, 543 (9th Cir. 2015).

240 CCFJA Report at 123.

241 HCRC Report at 12–13 (federal review takes at least 10 years).

242 HCRC Report at 13.

243 *Carter v. Broomfield*, 141 S. Ct. 1398 (Feb. 22, 2021) (denying certiorari where death sentences were imposed in 1990 and 1991); *Staten v. Davis*, 141 S. Ct. 1502 (March 1, 2021) (denying certiorari where death sentence was imposed in 1992); *Berryman v. Davis*, 2021 WL 1951885 (Mem.) (May 17, 2021) (denying certiorari where death sentence was imposed in 1988); *Kipp v. Davis*, 2021 WL 4508035 (Oct. 4, 2021) (denying certiorari where death sentence was imposed in 1989).

244 HCRC Report at 10.

245 *Id.*

246 HCRC Report at 9. To address this problem, the Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice recommended in 2008 that California fund an expansion of the HCRC from 34 to 150 lawyers and increase the budget by 500%. CCFJA Report at 135. This recommendation has never been adopted and HCRC continues to employ the same number of attorneys 13 years later.

247 See Voter Information Guide: Argument in Favor of Proposition 66, Cal. Secretary of State, Elections Division, 108 (Nov. 8, 2016).

248 *Briggs v. Brown*, 3 Cal.5th 808, 859 (2017) (deadline was not mandatory requirement but “an exhortation to the parties and the courts to handle cases as expeditiously as is consistent with the fair and principled administration of justice”).

249 Penal Code § 1509.1(a); Cal. Rule of Court 8.391(a)(3).

250 HCRC Report at 10–11.

251 Government Code § 68662.

252 HCRC Report at 10 n. 3, 25.

number of individuals on death row (363 people), were waiting for habeas counsel to be appointed in their case as in 2016 when Proposition 66 passed.²⁵³

Third, according to Committee panelist Sean Kennedy, many Superior Courts are not familiar with state habeas corpus law.²⁵⁴ Thus, it will likely take longer for Superior Courts to adjudicate capital habeas claims than it previously did for the California Supreme Court, which has decades of experience with this arcane area of law.

D. Poor quality defense at trial leads to death sentences.

When Governor Newsom initiated the death penalty moratorium in 2019, he highlighted that capital sentences in California are “unjustly and unfairly applied to people who cannot afford costly legal representation.”²⁵⁵

More than half of the 70 reversals of California death sentences by federal courts occurred on grounds that trial counsel provided constitutionally ineffective representation.²⁵⁶ In most of those cases, the death judgment was reversed because defense counsel failed to investigate or present mitigating evidence during the penalty phase of the trial.²⁵⁷

Nearly all people on death row could not afford to hire their own defense attorneys for trial.²⁵⁸ Attorneys with histories of ineptitude have repeatedly been appointed to represent indigent people facing death.²⁵⁹ In Los Angeles County, attorneys with prior or subsequent misconduct charges represented over one-third of the 22 cases where individuals received death sentences in 2013–2019.²⁶⁰

Counties that pursue death sentences also may not provide adequate pay or resources to defense counsel.²⁶¹ In some cases payment structures may discourage trial counsel from attempting to negotiate a less severe sentence or conduct robust investigation. For example, some counties employ flat-fee contracts where defense counsel fees are reduced by half or more if the prosecution decides not to seek the death penalty before trial,²⁶² and by 70% if the client agrees to take a plea prior to trial.²⁶³ In other counties, modest hourly rates in death penalty cases are reduced even further when a prosecutor decides to instead seek life without parole,²⁶⁴ thus discouraging early investigation and presentation of mitigating evidence to the District Attorney’s office. In yet another county, attorneys’ flat fees must also be used to pay investigators²⁶⁵ – financially disincentivizing their use.

X. CONCLUSION

The Committee’s study of California’s death penalty leads it to unanimously conclude that California’s system for capital punishment is beyond repair. California should abolish the death penalty and death row should be dismantled.

²⁵³ *Id.* at 9.

²⁵⁴ Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, Meeting on Mar. 25, 2021, Part 1, 0:52:10–0:52:55.

²⁵⁵ Governor’s Executive Order N-09-19, March 13, 2019. See also Paula Mitchell and Nancy Haydt, Alarcón Advocacy Ctr., *California Votes 2016: An Analysis of the Competing Death Penalty Ballot Initiatives*, 1 Loyola Law School Special Report, 27 (2016) (“It is universally acknowledged that ineffective counsel is the primary reason so many defendants are sentenced to death.”)

²⁵⁶ *California’s Broken Death Penalty* at 48. Federal courts have overturned 31 death judgments and reversed six capital murder convictions due to ineffective assistance of counsel. *Id.*

²⁵⁷ *Id.*

²⁵⁸ Information provided by the California Appellate Project. Specifically, in the last 21 years, CAP is aware of only two people sentenced to death that were represented by retained trial counsel.

²⁵⁹ Fair Punishment Project, *Too Broken to Fix: Part I: An In-Depth Look at America’s Outlier Death Penalty Counties*, 34, 38–39 (2016); Fair Punishment Project, *Too Broken to Fix Part II: An In-Depth Look at America’s Outlier Death Penalty Counties*, 17–18 (2016).

²⁶⁰ American Civil Liberties Union, *The California Death Penalty is Discriminatory, Unfair and Officially Suspended. So Why Does Jackie Lacey Continue to Use It?*, 2 (2019).

²⁶¹ For example, capital counsel is paid \$86 per hour in Kern County, and Orange County’s process of awarding indigent defense contracts on death penalty cases is geared toward making the lowest flat-fee payment. Staff interviews with Joel Lueck, Administrator of the Indigent Defense Panel in Kern County, and Orange County capital attorney Jack Earley. See also CCFJA Report at 130.

²⁶² Memorandum of Understanding in Los Angeles County Capital Case Appointments, 12; San Bernardino County Capital/LW/O Case Panel Application Package, 11–12; Fair Punishment Project, *Too Broken to Fix: Part I: An In-Depth Look at America’s Outlier Death Penalty Counties*, 33 (2016) (describing Riverside County; Committee staff confirmed that this same contract is still in effect).

²⁶³ *Id.*; San Bernardino County Capital/LW/O Case Panel Application Package, 11–12.

²⁶⁴ For example, the Kern County Indigent Defense Panel Fee Schedule reduces hourly fees from \$86 down to \$76. Committee staff interview with Joel Lueck, Administrator of the Indigent Defense Panel in Kern County.

²⁶⁵ Staff interview with Orange County capital attorney Jack Earley.

Information about the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code

Information about the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMMITTEE ON REVISION OF THE PENAL CODE

The Committee on Revision of the Penal Code was established in 2020 to study the Penal Code and make recommendations to simplify and rationalize criminal law in California.²⁶⁶

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE AND OTHER PERSONNEL

The following persons were members of the Committee when this report was approved:

Chair

Michael Romano

Legislative Members

Senator Nancy Skinner

Assemblymember Alex Lee

Gubernatorial Appointees

Hon. Peter Espinoza

Hon. Carlos Moreno

Priscilla Ocen

The following persons are on the Committee's legal staff:

Thomas M. Nosewicz

Legal Director

Rick Owen

Staff Attorney

The following persons provided substantial support for the Committee's legal work for this report:

Lara Hoffman

Natasha Minsker

The following persons are staff of the California Law Revision Commission and provide managerial and administrative support for the Committee:

Brian Hebert

Executive Director

Barbara Gaal

Chief Deputy Director

Debora Larrabee

Chief of Administrative Services

Data analysis in this report was performed by OpenLattice, Inc., with assistance from Steven Raphael for Figures 8, 9, and 10. This report was copy edited by Marissa Internicola and designed by Taylor Le.

COMMITTEE PANELISTS

The following persons appeared as panelists before the Committee on March 25, 2021 (in alphabetical order):

Sean Kennedy

Executive Director, Center for Juvenile Law and Policy, Loyola Law School

Elisabeth Semel

Director, UC Berkeley Death Penalty Clinic

Steven Shatz

Professor Emeritus, University of San Francisco School of Law

Carol Steiker

Co-Director, Criminal Justice Policy Program at Harvard Law School

Jordan Steiker

Director, University of Texas at Austin School of Law Capital Punishment Center

Dr. Sherod Thaxton

Professor of Law, UCLA School of Law

Dr. George Woods

President, International Academy of Law and Mental Health

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Committee is deeply grateful to Arnold Ventures and the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative for providing generous support relating to the Committee's research and data analysis. The Committee also extends special thanks to the personnel at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation who assisted the Committee's data-gathering efforts. The Committee also received generous support from staff and faculty at Stanford Law School in developing our recommendations and drafting this report.

Appendix of Data Sources and Methodology

Appendix of Data Sources and Methodology

APPENDIX OF DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Figure 1 and 2 Sources:

Executions: CDCR, *Inmates Executed 1978 to Present*.

Non-execution deaths: CDCR, *Condemned Inmates Who Have Died Since 1978* (as of September 22, 2021).

Initial sentences: California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California*, Table 35 (2020). People with multiple sentences in the same county in the same year are counted once. New death sentences imposed in 2021 are based on data from CDCR.

Resentences: For 1978–2002, California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California*, Table 24 (2002). For 2003–2021, Data provided by Habeas Corpus Resource Center.

Total number of condemned people at end of year: For 1978–2011, California Department of Justice, *Homicide in California*, Table 35 (2011). For 2012–2019, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., *Death Row U.S.A.* reports. For 2020, Habeas Corpus Resource Center, *Annual Report 2020*, 8. For 2021, CDCR, *Condemned Inmate List* (as of September 3, 2021).

Figure 8 Methodology:

To make this scatterplot, we find the total number of death penalty sentences per county between 2000–2020 and divide that value over the number of total homicides per county between 2000–2020. The average homicide rate is found by taking the average of the total homicides per year over the population of that year between 2000–2020.

For the purposes of visualization, Colusa county (average population 20,824 people, fourteen total murders in 2000–2020, and two death penalty sentences) and Modoc county (average population 9,291, thirteen total murders between 2000–2020, and one death sentence) have been removed from the sample. This is due to the low total murders between 2000–2020 compared to other counties in California, causing the ratio of total murders and death penalties to be significantly higher than other counties. Given the low number of homicides, we are unable to draw concrete conclusions from these two counties.

Figure 9 Methodology:

To make this graphic, we find the total number of death penalty sentences per county between 2000–2020 and divide that value over the number of total homicides per county between 2000–2020. We define this as the propensity of a county to impose death penalty sentences. Then, we divide the counties into three groups of propensities: no propensity (between 2000–2020, the county has not sentenced anyone to death), lower propensity, and higher propensity (between 2000–2020, the county was less likely or more likely to sentence someone to death).

compared to other counties in California). The cut-off between the lower and higher likelihood is based on the median calculated propensity, excluding counties without any death sentences. We take the average of the homicide rate between the three groups, weighted by population of the county by year to get the homicide rate by year.

The higher propensity counties are Contra Costa, Marin, Yolo Ventura, Tulare, Napa, Orange, El Dorado, Shasta, Lake, Imperial, Riverside, Kings, Modoc, San Luis Obispo, and Colusa. The lower propensity counties are Fresno, Kern, Stanislaus, Merced, Monterey, San Joaquin, Sonoma, Santa Clara, San Mateo, San Diego, Los Angeles, Madera, Sacramento, Alameda, San Bernardino, and Santa Barbara.

Figure 10 Methodology:

To make this scatterplot, we find the number of death penalty sentences per county between 2000–2020 and divide that value over the number of total homicides per county between 2000–2020. We then create a scatterplot based on Proposition 62 “No” votes and the death penalty propensity. To show the overall trend of the relationship between Proposition 62 “No” votes and death penalty propensity, we include a quadratic trend line, weighted by the population of each county.

Figures 8, 9, and 10 Sources:

Homicide rate: Homicide data is from California Department of Justice’s OpenJustice data set. County population data is from U.S. Census Bureau.

Death penalty sentences imposed: Data provided by the Habeas Corpus Resource Center. This data includes all death sentences imposed per county per year, including resentences.

Proposition 62 voting data: California Secretary of State, *Statement of Vote*, General Election, November 8, 2016, 71–73.