

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Recently, a sitting circuit court judge in Seminole County recommended the abolition of the death penalty in Florida. The reason for the jurist's anti-death penalty stance was not grounded on moral repugnance of state-sponsored homicide. His opinion was not based on the fact that the death penalty is not a deterrent. The judge's views were not founded upon his observations of the often arbitrary way that some are selected for capital punishment, while the majority of others alleged to have committed equally heinous crimes are not charged with capital murder. Despite numerous recent D.N.A. exonerations, including ten (10) in Florida, the judge's recommendation to abolish the death penalty was based on a much less lofty consideration – it's expensive. That's right – money.

As noted by the circuit court judge, in these tough budget times the legislature could conceivably save millions of dollars by eliminating the death penalty. Contrary to popular belief, it costs considerably more to execute someone than to keep them in prison for life. While an exact amount cannot be determined, credible reporters, such as the eminent judicial college death penalty teacher Judge O.H. Eaton, have cited studies that suggest that it costs six (6) times more, or three point two million dollars (\$3,200,000) to execute someone.

The Death Penalty Information Center maintains that Florida spends fifty-one million dollars (\$51,000,000) a year more to execute people convicted of first degree murder than to keep them in prison for life without parole. A capital case involving a serial killer can cost several million dollars, up to the twelve million (\$12,000,000) it reportedly cost to execute Ted Bundy. Given the relatively small number of actual executions, keeping the death penalty on the books cost Florida taxpayers twenty-four million dollars (\$24,000,000) per execution. That's big money!

If considerations such as morality, fairness in implementation, holy mercy, or the absolute irrevocability of the death penalty will not succeed in moving the legislature to abolish state sanctioned homicide, maybe the bottom line will. Those of us striving to put an end to capital punishment in Florida would no doubt much prefer if that occurs as a result of a new enlightenment and the vindication of our anti-death penalty views. However, when it comes to the matter of life over death, we'll take life over death for any darned reason whatsoever, even those devoid of substantive considerations. I suspect those on death row would, too. And that is the bottom line.

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