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District Attorney Michael Dougherty Joins Over 95 Criminal Justice Leaders Call for an Immediate End to the Federal Death Penalty

Current and Former Prosecutors, Law Enforcement Leaders, and Former DOJ Officials Call for Halt of Scheduled Federal Executions

Today, District Attorney Michael Dougherty joined a bipartisan group of over 95 criminal justice leaders — including 60 current elected prosecutors (District Attorneys, State Attorneys, Prosecuting Attorneys and Attorneys General), nine former U.S. Attorneys and 14 current and former Police Chiefs and Sheriffs — and issued a joint statement calling for an immediate halt to federal executions and asking the President to commute the sentences of the [five people](#) now scheduled to be executed by the federal government over the next two months. The signatories warn that **a rush to carry out executions during a pandemic, and in the final days of the current administration, would** compromise trust in the American legal system and perpetuate a deeply flawed and unjust process.

District Attorney Michael Dougherty stated, “Our office actively supported Colorado’s successful repeal of this long-outdated sentence -- one that is wrought with the potential for wrongful death, utterly expensive, and results in delays for the victims of crime for decades. Now, as we watch the federal government rush to execute these individuals, we must again denounce the death penalty. It is neither just nor fair. Our government should not put to death its own citizens. I am proud to join with other leaders, including former District Attorney Stan Garnett, in this important effort.”

The United States was one of only [20 countries](#) to use the death penalty last year and is far [more likely](#) to impose the punishment in cases involving Black defendants or white victims. Since 1973, at least [172](#) people on death row have been exonerated. The COVID-19 pandemic has only magnified concerns with application of the death penalty, making it impossible for many attorneys to effectively represent their clients, investigate last-minute leads, introduce new witness testimony, or even see their clients in person.

Our statement calls on the President to commute all outstanding federal death sentences to life imprisonment. This is “an extreme punishment, commensurate with the most egregious of crimes,” the law enforcement and criminal justice leaders argue, but avoids the injustice and flawed process inherent in the application of the death penalty.

“The death penalty is a cruel, ineffective, unjust punishment. It is ripe with racial bias, is often used against the most vulnerable among us, leaves us no chance to correct wrongful convictions, and does nothing to improve public safety. Rushing to execute people in the midst of a presidential transition and at a time when COVID-19 is surging would seriously undermine the public’s already-damaged trust in the justice system, and thus erode public safety,” said Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of Fair and Just Prosecution, the organizer of the statement and a former federal prosecutor who also signed on to the statement. “This administration has a chance to show us that it values fairness, justice and compassion over vengeance — I hope they take it.”

“As a longtime law enforcement leader, former Police Chief and former president of the National Police Foundation, I have been committed for decades to promoting public safety. Yet many members of our community recognize that the death penalty is arbitrary, cruel, and often racially-biased.” said Jim Bueerman, former Chief of Police of Redlands, California and former President of the National Police Foundation, and another signatory to the joint statement. “The use of capital punishment undermines efforts to protect communities by further eroding the fragile bonds of trust between law enforcement and the people we serve.”

Read the full statement and see the list of signatories [here](#).