

We've learned a lot about the death penalty in the last 30 years. For three decades, we have tinkered with the death penalty in an effort to make it fair, accurate, and effective. Yet the system continues to fail.

The risk of executing an innocent person is real. The DNA era has given us irrefutable proof that our criminal justice system sentences innocent people to die. Evidence we once thought reliable like eyewitness identification is not always accurate. DNA evidence has led to hundreds of exonerations, but it isn't available in most cases. Despite our best intentions, human beings simply can't be right 100% of the time. And when a life is on the line, one mistake is one too many.

Fairness in the death penalty is a moving target. We expect justice to be blind. Otherwise it's not justice at all. Yet poor defendants sentenced to die have been represented by attorneys who were drunk, asleep, or completely inexperienced. Geography and race often determine who lives and dies, and after 30 years we have not found a way to make the system less arbitrary. Every effort to fix the system just makes it more complex – not more fair.

The complicated process has drained our resources. The death penalty is longer and more complicated because a life is on the line – shortcuts could mean an irreversible mistake. For this reason, the death penalty costs millions more dollars than alternatives – even before a single appeal is even filed. The time spent pursuing one capital case could solve and prosecute scores of other non-capital cases, improving public safety and ensuring that people responsible for violent acts are held accountable.

The death penalty has failed victims' families. The longer process prolongs the pain of victims' families, who must relive their trauma as courts repeat trials and hearings trying to get it right. Most cases result in a life sentence in the end anyway – but only after the family has suffered years of uncertainty. To be meaningful, justice should be swift and sure – but the death penalty is just the opposite.

Americans are ready. The mounting evidence of waste, inaccuracy, and bias has shattered public confidence in the criminal justice system. Death sentences are at an all-time low and public support for the death penalty has dropped in favor of life without parole. Across the country, states are reconsidering their death penalty statutes. The death penalty is dying. Americans are ready to see it go.