

# Death Penalty Focus

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## **DEATH SENTENCES DROPPED SIGNIFICANTLY IN 2008 SAYS DPIC REPORT FIGURES IN CALIFORNIA REFLECT NATIONAL TREND**

**CALIFORNIA**— Executions, as well as imposition of death sentences, are in historic decline, according to the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) 2008 Year End Report. This is particularly true in California, where according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, there were only 14 new death sentences in 2008 as of November 17th. This is a drastic reduction from less than 10 years ago, in 1999, when the annual total was 42. The DPIC report says there was a record low in executions nationally, from 98 in 1999 when executions peaked, to just 37 in 2008. The number of death sentences has decreased 60% since the 1990s.

As the nation's economic crisis continues its catastrophic impact on states' budgets, the DPIC report cites a number of instances when the high costs of the death penalty was an issue for states' policy makers. In June, the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice found that California annually spends approximately \$137.7 million dollars on the death penalty. This year, the State Legislature also ponied up an additional \$120 million for a new death row housing facility.

Stefanie Faucher, Program Director of Death Penalty Focus, said "It is remarkable how much California is willing to spend to hold on to a broken and dysfunctional death penalty that provides absolutely no benefit to society considering the state now has a projected deficit of \$40 billion. Shouldn't we just end this expensive and wasteful charade?"

The Gallup Poll's latest national survey of opinion on the death penalty found that support for capital punishment dropped by 5 percentage points from 2007, down to 64% support from 69% last year. The percentage of those opposing capital punishment rose from 27% to 30%. This poll reflects that support for the death penalty is equal to the lowest level in the Gallup Polls during the past 30 years. Support had reached a high of 80% in 1994. More importantly, the last time Gallup asked a more in-depth question about alternatives (which would be a better punishment for murder, the death penalty or life in prison with absolutely no possibility of parole?) was in 2006. In that poll, more people supported life in prison without parole (48%) than supported the death penalty (47%). (Gallup Poll, 2008 Oct 3-5, [Death Penalty](#))

According to the DPIC report, there were more than 20 stays of execution in which death row inmates' mental illness, ineffective legal representation, conflict of interests, and the possible innocence of defendants, were issues. Some inmates were only days or hours away from being executed.

The DPIC report notes that four more inmates were exonerated nationally, bringing the total to 130 since 1973, the year that a U.S. Supreme Court ruling permitted states to resume executions. These stays and exonerations are further illustrative of the death penalty system's inherent flaws.

To read the report, please visit: <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/2008YearEnd.pdf>