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Death Penalty vs. Life in Prison: A Cost Analysis

by Sierra Gullette – University of Texas at Tyler – Honors Program



Abstract

This project assesses the differences, cost wise, of sentencing someone to life in prison without parole versus the death penalty. It examines ideas from a retired Senior Judge of the Fifth Court of Appeal in Florida and an Assistant State Attorney from the 18th Circuit Court of Brevard County, Florida.

Figure 1 Cost of Life in Prison without Parole

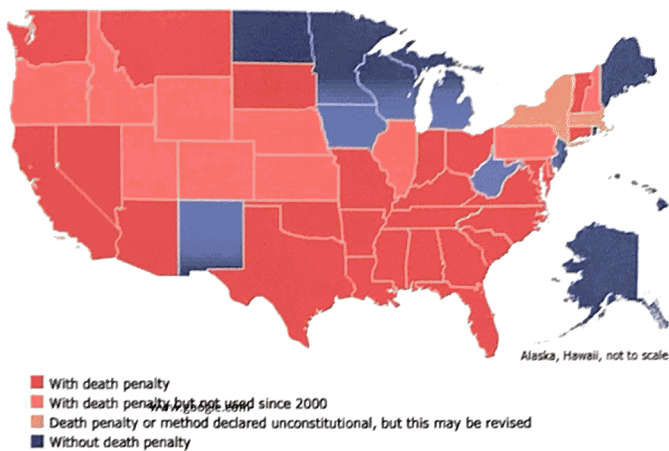
	Age	x	Life Expectancy	x	Incarceration \$	=	Total Cost
Gore	32		45.27	x	\$25,071	=	\$1,134,960
Waterhouse	34		43.40				1,088,080
Chandler	48		30.71				769,990
Valle	31		46.20				1,158,280
Grossman	20		56.40				1,414,280

The average cost of keeping these five inmates in prison for life would have been \$1,113,062.

Figure 2 Cost of Supporting Inmate Until Execution

	# years on death row	x	Incarceration \$	=	Total Cost
Gore	26.4		\$25,071	=	\$661,870
Waterhouse	31				777,200
Chandler	17.03				426,950
Valle	30.13				755,390
Grossman	24.2				606,720

The average cost of maintaining an inmate until execution is \$645,626



Methods

For Florida, DP costs consist of sustaining them on death row and the DP itself. On average, it costs \$25,000 per year to support an inmate on death row. Florida spends about \$51 million for the option of the DP. Time and money accompany appeals, post-appeal motions, and supplementary appeals. One of the largest costs is for collateral attorneys, who represent inmates. Costs of sentencing a prisoner to life in prison involve the annual costs of sustaining them in prison plus Geriatric care, and other court costs.

Figure 3 Real Annual Cost of DP Including Expenses and Budget

Gore and Waterhouse	\$4,387,000 - \$25,500,000
Chandler and Valle	\$4,387,000 - \$25,500,000
Grossman	\$8,775,000 - \$25,500,000

Figure 4 Comparative Cost of Life in Prison vs. Death Penalty

Inmate	if executed	if life in prison
Gore	\$5,049,370 to \$26,161,180	\$1,134,960
Waterhouse	\$5,164,700 to \$26,277,200	\$1,088,080
Chandler	\$4,817,450 to \$25,929,950	\$ 769,990
Valle	\$5,142,890 to \$26,255,390	\$1,158,280
Grossman	\$9,381,720 to \$51,606,720	\$1,414,000

Conclusion

The cost of the death penalty does outweigh the cost of life in prison because of the high court costs, the price for the death penalty option, and costs for expertise.

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