

THE CONSTITUTION PROJECT



Safeguarding Liberty, Justice & the Rule of Law

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Evangelical Leaders Back Death Penalty Reform

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Evangelical leaders from around the country are endorsing sweeping reforms to the administration of capital punishment in America.

In a [statement released](#) today, the leaders applauded the "extensive and sober review of our country's death penalty system" contained in a report issued earlier in the month by The Constitution Project, and called on evangelicals "to help implement its recommendations, wherever the death penalty is imposed."

"While searching and thoughtful discourse on the morality of capital punishment is a critical discussion that should continue in all communities of faith, this new report provides us with new -- and troubling -- information about the reality of the death penalty in America," the statement read.

The [new report](#) looks at a number of issues surrounding the administration of capital punishment, including safeguards to prevent wrongful convictions and executions such as preventing the execution of people with intellectual disability or severe mental illness, ensuring full 6th Amendment rights to effective counsel for capital defendants, changes in "felony murder" laws so that only those who intentionally kill face the death penalty, and radically improving the executive clemency process for death row inmates. It also suggests substantial reforms to the use of forensic evidence and eyewitness testimony, two of the most common causes of errors in capital cases.

The report also recommends several changes to lethal injection protocols to address unacceptable and failed attempts at executions, with that of Clayton Lockett in Oklahoma being only the latest, including the need for lifting the veil of secrecy surrounding executions and addressing the grave risks posed by using experimental, unapproved drugs from unnamed sources.

"Our faith communities vary on whether the Bible permits society to take the life of another. But we all agree that sunlight must be shown on how this punishment is actually meted out in our country," the evangelical leaders said. "What this report shows us is that from arrest all the way through the execution process, our system is rife with unfairness and injustice," they added.

Among those signing the statement are: David P. Gushee, Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University; Roger E. Olson, Foy Valentine Professor of Christian Theology and Ethics at Baylor University; Gabriel Salguero, pastor at The Lamb's Church in New York City and president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition; James Slack, a professor in the Robertson

School of Government at Regent University; Al Tizon, Co-President of Evangelicals for Social Action and, Jim Wallis, editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

The Constitution Project is a nonpartisan legal watchdog group based in Washington, D.C. TCP's [death penalty committee](#) is a unique group of criminal justice and other experts from across the ideological spectrum, including those with experience as judges, prosecutors, defenders, law enforcement officers, policymakers, victim advocates and scholars. The committee comprises both death penalty supporters and death penalty opponents. They produced the report after nearly two years of analysis and deliberation.

The evangelical's statement and the report are available at <http://www.constitutionproject.org>.

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[About The Constitution Project](#)

Created out of the belief that we must cast aside the labels that divide us in order to keep our democracy strong, The Constitution Project (TCP) brings together policy experts and legal practitioners from across the political spectrum to foster consensus-based solutions to the most difficult constitutional challenges of our time. TCP seeks to reform the nation's broken criminal justice system and to strengthen the rule of law through scholarship, advocacy, policy reform and public education initiatives. Established in 1997, TCP is based in Washington, D.C.