

# The Death Penalty Ignores the Needs of Families of Victims

NCADP Blog > The Death Penalty Ignores the Needs of Families of Victims



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One of the arguments frequently given in support of the death penalty revolves around the idea that the execution of an offender will provide closure to the grieving family of the victim. However, recent research on the topic has suggested that this may not be the case. A [2012 study conducted in Minnesota](#) produced findings indicating that the death penalty likely does not serve to advance the healing process of the families of victims. This particular study represents the first of its kind to systematically examine the healing process of the families of victims when the death penalty has been given as a sentence. The results of this study indicate higher levels of physical, psychological, and behavioral health in victims' family members in cases where life sentences were given, as opposed to the death penalty, as well as greater satisfaction with the criminal justice system in these individuals.

Megan Smith of Pennsylvania, whose father and stepmother were murdered in 2001, [recently wrote](#) about her feelings regarding the death penalty. Megan stated that she does not want to live a life weighed down by the "heavy load of bitterness and hatred that the death penalty brings." She goes on to describe what her view of justice is from the perspective of the family member of a victim, stating that the surviving family members need support and guidance on "how to navigate the funeral, the trial, the money, the grief" following the crime. Additionally, she highlights the need for community safety and crime prevention programs. Megan describes how she views justice for victims' families as involving resources and programs to assist in the healing process, while the death penalty is "far removed" from this route to closure.

In order to implement these types of services to help victims' families, appropriate funding is needed. The major funding source for victim services throughout the country comes from the [Crime Victims Fund](#), also known as the Fund, which was established by the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA). Fund dollars originate from offenders convicted of federal crimes in the form of criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalties, and from U.S. Attorneys' Offices, federal U.S. courts, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. These funds go toward [victim compensation services](#), including funeral and burial costs and mental health counseling, as well as victim assistance services, such as criminal justice advocacy. These services are provided for victims of crimes and the families of victims. However, to ensure that these resources and

services are readily available for all victims around the country, sufficient funding is of utmost importance. Although the major funding source for the Crime Victims Fund stems from convicted offenders, if additional funding was available, victim services programs would be better equipped to help assist victims and their families.

Although the costs associated with the death penalty vary from state to state, some estimates have indicated that a state may spend one million dollars more for a death penalty trial than for a non-death penalty trial, with **costs increasing with time**. When considering the significant increase in psychological, physical, and behavioral health that victims can experience when provided with services assisting in their healing process, we should reconsider the concerning amount of financial resources given toward funding the death penalty. The death penalty has proven itself to be a notoriously expensive process, and as recent research has indicated, it demonstrates inferior capabilities in providing victims' families with closure and psychological healing. The funding appointed to the death penalty would be better served in victim services programs, where the healing and recovery of victims and victims' family members receive primary focus.

***The NCADP has created the 90 Million Strong Campaign to unite the voices of those who believe the death penalty is wrong. We need to demonstrate that the broad public support to end this practice is already here in America, and 90 million people speaking up can make a difference.***

*The 90 million people who oppose the death penalty are organized, energized, and ready to end capital punishment. Join us today.*

Tags: #90 Million Strong Campaign, #90mStrong, #90mStrong Monday, #HaltAllExecutions, #victims