Oregon faith leaders’ statement on death penalty commutation

As faith leaders, we call on Governor Kate Brown to commute all death sentences in Oregon to life without the possibility of parole. We base this request on shared values, rooted in our religious traditions: compassion, the affirmation of human dignity and respect for all life.

Currently, 35 individuals sit on Oregon’s death row, where the state holds the legal authority to take the life of its prisoners. DNA testing has already exonerated 156 people from death rows across the country, and a motion for DNA testing was filed this month in the case of one death row inmate in our own state.

There is also the matter of fiscal responsibility. In our state, keeping a person on death row costs as much as a million dollars more than life imprisonment without parole, according to an academic study released by Lewis & Clark Law School and Seattle University. These limited funds could be shifted towards more noble purposes rooted in our religious traditions such as providing shelter to the houseless or hot meals for hungry children.

We believe that those who break the law must be held accountable for their actions. At the same time, as faith leaders we believe in the sanctity of human life and the potential for redemption in our state’s justice system. A penalty which cannot be shown to be applied fairly and denies the sanctity of human life while removing the possibility of redemption is fundamentally at odds with our religious teachings. We petition Governor Brown to commute all death sentences as an act of grace, clemency and leadership on this morally critical issue.

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