

Iowans Against the Death Penalty

Monthly Newsletter 2021

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Death penalty bill passes out of Iowa Senate subcommittee

[Senate Study Bill 1004](#) (SSB 1004) passed out of the Senate Judiciary subcommittee by a vote of 2-1. It was not a surprise. Republican Senators [Julian Garrett](#) (R-Indianola), chair; and [Jason Schultz](#) (R-Schleswig) were the two voting to move the bill forward to the full [Senate Judiciary Committee](#). Senator [Tony Bisignano](#) (D-Des Moines) was the sole vote against moving the bill.

If enacted the bill would create a “capital murder offense by establishing the penalty of death for murder in the first-degree offenses involving kidnapping and sexual abuse offenses against the same victim who is a minor.” It has been said by proponents that “currently in Iowa, the stiffest penalty is the same for kidnapping and raping a minor as it is for kidnapping, raping and murdering a minor.” Technically, that’s right. However, if a child in Iowa is kidnapped, raped, and murdered now, a prosecutor would be wise to go after a punishment of life in prison for each count. That would mean three consecutive life sentences. If the defendant was found not guilty of one of the crimes, the other two would result in two consecutive life sentences. On the other hand, if the defendant is charged with capital murder, and “a technicality” negates the sentence, the defendant could possibly walk out of prison. It’s doubtful that would happen, but the question must be asked: What if?

At its peak, 129 people connected to the [Zoom](#) call on the subcommittee meeting. The tone was respectful and serious. Twenty-two of the attendees spoke. All but one individual opposed the bill. The person supporting the bill was [Rev. Samuel Jones](#) of [Faith Baptist Church](#) in Hudson.

Rev. Jones more than supported the bill; he suggested that the death penalty be invoked for all murders. His basis was Chapter 13 of Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans.

Let everyone obey the authorities that are over him, for there is no authority except from God, and all authority that exists is established by God. As a consequence, the man who opposes authority rebels against the ordinance of God; those who resist thus shall draw condemnation down upon themselves. Rulers cause no fear when a man does what is right but only when his conduct is evil. Do you wish to be free from fear of authority? Do what is right and you will gain its approval, for the rule is God’s servant to work for your good. Only if you do wrong ought you to be afraid. It is not with purpose that the ruler carries the sword; he is God’s servant, to inflict his avenging wrath upon the wrongdoer. You must obey, then, not only to escape punishment but also for conscience sake. Romans 13: 1-5

That's sort of a stretch to find a segment of the New Testament that some interpret as acquiescing to the government for its ability to do God's work by "inflicting his vengeance wrath." This argument in favor of justifying the death penalty has been used before, but mostly in recent years. It seems to have arisen since many people now know what Jesus said about capital punishment as it was applied in the Old Testament.

"You have heard the commandment, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' But what I say to you is: offer no resistance to injury. When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other." Matthew 5: 38-39.

St. Paul wrote several letters to the Church in various regions. Letters were sent to the Romans, the Hebrews, the Church at Corinth and several other locations throughout the Mediterranean Sea. One of those letters required women to cover their heads while praying, while men were to worship bareheaded 1Cor 11: 1-16. St. Paul's reason was inane – "because Christ is supreme over every man [and] the man is supreme over his wife." Another letter instructs slaves to obey their masters. After his direction for men to be supreme over their wives, he continues: "God is supreme over Christ." How many Christians are taught that God and Christ are one and the same? Things have changed since the era in which St. Paul wrote. He addressed the issues of the time.

There are numerous examples in the New Testament where Jesus denounces capital punishment. That message may come at a later date. There is not enough room to chronicle all those references here.

Money and the death penalty

Several speakers brought up the exorbitant costs of implementing the death penalty, even if the state has no one on death row. Two participants brought up the fact that the death penalty will cost the State of Iowa an ongoing annual appropriation, even if there is no one residing on death row. The [Death Penalty Information Center](#) has posted on its website a recent "study of Nebraska's death penalty [which] found that the state spends \$14.6 million per year to maintain its capital punishment system." It's not appropriate for the Iowa Legislature to maintain a separate budget for a project which is not necessary.

There are many more interesting pieces of information provided by the speakers. The following MP3 should be able to allow you to listen to the subcommittee meeting.



HSB 1004
Subcommittee meeti

At the end of the meeting, subcommittee Chair, Senator Garrett reminded everyone that this is a "very limited bill," and that there are "safeguards in the bill paying attention to the mental state of the defendant." It is a limited bill. Anyone who has been around Iowa politics for the past forty years knows that former Governor Terry Branstad offered a "limited" death penalty bill during every General Assembly. Each bill was limited in a different manner. A smart political

practice is to get “your foot in the door.” Otherwise, get a bill that includes only the basics. Thereafter, amend the law to expand the scope of its original intent. When a legislator tells you that he or she has no intention of expanding the law’s range of limitations, understand that another legislator, or general assembly will pick up where the original law was “limited.”

Senator Garrett also informed listeners that just because there are studies out there saying that the death penalty is not a deterrent, there are just as many studies proving that it is a deterrent, “you just have to look harder.” You can’t argue with facts. States that have capital punishment, such as Texas and Florida, have higher murder “rates” than those without the death penalty, such as Iowa, New York, and Michigan.

What about victims?

His final comment was that he hasn’t heard much from victims. That is understandable, but not truthful. Two speakers came forward talking about their life experiences. One such victim was Christy Wolfe. Two of Ms. Wolfe’s sisters were brutally murdered in Pittsburg, PA, by a neighbor who was eventually found and arrested. He was convicted and is serving life sentences in Pennsylvania. The family did not want a death penalty, and one was not sought. Ms. Wolfe’s mother conveyed her message to the legislators through Christy. The process that brought the defendant to serve life in prison has brought the family closure, whereas a move to seek the death penalty would have brought about years and years of appeals, motions, and an everlasting life of never bringing finality to the murders.

In addition, if the law is so narrow in scope as to be extremely rare, as Senator Garrett proclaimed, there would be so few victims. That is IADP’s point. If victims didn’t come forward, perhaps there is no need to go forward with a law that may not be used in our lifetimes, but will cost us millions of dollars yearly in upkeep for a facility that sits empty.

There is always an alternative

It has been noted that since Governors Branstad and Reynolds took office in 2011, there are 65 unsolved murders, according to [Iowa Cold Cases](#). That statistic does not include any homicides from 2020 because they aren't "cold" yet. It would be a much more fruitful effort to concentrate money, time and personnel on reducing the number of cold cases in Iowa.

Contacting legislators

Please contact your [senator and representative](#) and ask each if they oppose the death penalty. Then, we ask you share that information with us. info@iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.com or mrtyryn@gmail.com

Contact information for your senator and representative should be located on their legislative website page. For [senators](#), locate the name of you senator and click on the senator’s name. Information on the senator’s committees, legislation introduced, email address, physical address,

cell phone and Senate phone will come up on the senator's page. For representatives, follow the same procedure as previously outlined for senators.

Is this a serious threat?

Yes! Turnover in the Iowa House of Representatives, and especially the Iowa Senate has brought new legislators with different views than of those they replaced. We need your help to identify the positions of your senator and representative.

It costs to run any organization. While IADP operates entirely with volunteers, it costs money to maintain a website, to print and mail materials, and to organize events.

Your membership in IADP

Membership in Iowans Against the Death Penalty is \$15 annually. If you cannot recall the last time you paid yearly dues, your membership has most likely lapsed. We encourage you to join us by submitting a check for \$15, along with your name, address, zip code, and email address to:

IADP
PO Box 782
Des Moines, IA 50303

Or, by joining online at: <http://www.iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.org/join-our-mailing-list>

IADP is a section 501(c)(4) organization which uses some of its funds for lobbying. Membership contributions to IADP are NOT tax deductible.

Iowans Against the Death Penalty FUND is an IADP sister organization which can accept tax deductible gifts and grants since it is a section 501(c)(3) organization with the Internal Revenue Service. Making a tax-deductible gift to the IADP FUND does not mean you are an IADP member.

Updates to death penalty news in Iowa

IADP will continue to send out timely news on the death penalty in Iowa as it becomes available. If you choose not to receive these messages (no more than necessary), please respond to this email by typing "Unsubscribe" in the subject line.

Iowans Against the Death Penalty is a single-issue organization established in 1962. We were instrumental in the repeal of the state's death penalty law in 1965, and IADP has worked vigilantly to resist efforts to reinstate it over the years.

Marty Ryan

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