

The Abolitionist

Coloradans Against the Death Penalty

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Colorado Council of Churches Takes Stand Against the Death Penalty

In keeping with the long-time position of the National Council of Churches, the Colorado Council of Churches has officially gone on record as opposing the death penalty. The newly-passed addition to their Public Policy Statement reads as follows:

"The member denominations of the Colorado Council of Churches support legislation that will reduce the implementation of the death penalty:

- 1) the elimination of the death penalty coupled with the option of life imprisonment without possibility of parole.
- 2) a moratorium on the death penalty.
- 3) any reduction in the offenses that may qualify for the death penalty."

Recently, members of the CADP Board of Directors met with Rev. James R. Ryan, Council Executive of the Colorado Council of Churches, to explore coordinating efforts to abolish the death penalty in Colorado. The Council and CADP hope to work together in the areas of state legislation and public education in particular. The Council of Churches has been a significant force in fighting the death penalty in other states, and CADP looks forward to working with them in Colorado to achieve our common goals.

The work of the Council is done, in large part, by two Commissions (Christian Unity and Justice) and three Task Forces (Anti-Hate, Restorative Justice, and Youth Ministry).

The Council is an organization of primarily Protestant denominations of the Christian church. Member churches include African Methodist Episcopal, American Baptist Churches, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, National Baptist Convention USA, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, and Metropolitan Community Churches.

The Unitarian Universalist Association is an associate member and the Roman Catholic Church holds observer status.

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First Colorado Sentencing Jury Under New Law Rejects Death

During the 1980s and early 90s, Colorado juries were not returning enough death sentences to please prosecutors and pro-death legislators. In 1995, lawmakers decided to have three-judge panels make sentencing decisions. When even that did not sufficiently increase the number of death sentences, there was talk of changing to a single-judge sentencing system. Before that could happen, however, the US Supreme Court's *Ring v. Arizona* decision invalidated Colorado's sentencing scheme, essentially forcing a return to sentencing by jury.

This past December, the new law was put to its first test. Dante Owens, convicted of first-degree murder in a 1998 Aurora drug deal gone wrong, was spared the death penalty by his sentencing jury. While jurors agreed that Owens had participated in the crime, they had doubts about his level of culpability.

"In the exercise of their personal moral judgment, they unanimously agreed that life was the appropriate sentence for Dante Owens," said defense attorney David Lane.

Neither of Owens' two co-defendants received death, either. Co-defendant Randy Canister was convicted in July 2002, just after Colorado's death penalty statute had been invalidated. A judge later ruled that Canister could not be executed. Co-defendant Trevon Washington was sentenced to life in August 2003, after a judge ruled that he is mentally retarded.

CADP to Hold Speaker Training

CADP is building its speakers bureau for an aggressive speaking campaign to the general public. A speakers' training is being organized for a Saturday in May. There will be 1-1/2 hours of training on how to speak, followed by information on the current status of the death penalty in Colorado and the various arguments against it - religious, social, financial, etc. We are purchasing a database of nearly 800 Colorado organizations that need regular monthly speakers

(Lions Clubs, Rotary, etc.).

Please plan to join us for the training and volunteer to speak. If you are interested in speaking for CADP, please mail details of your speaking experience, what type and size of group you are willing to talk to, any constraints as to the geographic area, day and time to:

Don Bounds
1994 E. Lincoln Ave.
Parker, Colorado 80134
donbounds@earthlink.net



PO Box 1745
Denver, CO 80201-1745

phone: 303-715-3163
fax: 303-715-2034
email: info@coadp.org
website: www.coadp.org

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National Death Penalty Expert to Speak at CADP Dinner

Richard C. Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center in Washington, D.C., will be the keynote speaker at the CADP Annual Dinner on Thursday, March 18.

The Death Penalty Information Center is a non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. The Center prepares in-depth reports, issues press releases, conducts briefings for journalists, and serves as a resource to those working on this issue. Since its founding in 1990, the Center's reports on issues related to the death penalty have received wide attention.

Mr. Dieter has been the Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center since 1992. He received his law degree from Georgetown, where he was one of the University's first Public Inter-

est Law Scholars and served as an editor of the Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics. He is a member of the Maryland Bar, the Bar of the District of Columbia, and the Bar of the U. S. Supreme Court, and serves as an Adjunct Professor at the Catholic University School of Law, where he teaches a seminar on the death penalty.

Mr. Dieter has worked for many years on issues related to human rights and the death penalty. He has given numerous speeches at universities and is frequently quoted in the major newspapers around the country. He has appeared on NBC Nightly News, ABC World News, CBS Evening News, The Today Show, CNN Headline News, C-Span, Court-TV, and many other programs. He has testified about the death penalty before numerous state legislatures and has prepared reports for the U. S. House Judiciary

Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights. He has authored articles on the death penalty for magazines and scholarly journals. His most recent publications are *Innocence* and *The Death Penalty: The Increasing*



RICHARD C. DIETER, ESQ.
Executive Director
Death Penalty Information
Center

Danger of Executing the Innocent; The Death Penalty in Black and White: Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Decides; and International Perspectives on the Death Penalty: A Costly Isolation for the U.S. For more information on the Death Penalty Information Center, go to www.deathpenaltyinfo.org.

The March 18th dinner will also feature presentation of the Abolitionist of the Year award. This year's award is going to Michael L. Radelet, Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado. Mike Radelet is an internationally-recognized death penalty scholar, expert witness, and long-time anti-death penalty activist. He has befriended both death row inmates and families of homicide victims.

Register for the CADP Annual Dinner online at <http://www.coadp.org/dinner/> or use the mail-in form on the back of this newsletter.

The Abolitionist is a newsletter of death penalty news and information in the state of Colorado. For the latest in national death penalty news, please visit our website at www.coadp.org.

Colorado **Against** the
DEATH
PENALTY

PO Box 1745
Denver, CO 80201-1745

Forwarding Service Requested



Please Join us for the CADP Annual Dinner!

Thursday, March 18

Frank H. Ricketson Law Building

University of Denver (Evans and University)

6 PM Wine & Beer • 7 PM Dinner & Program

____ Yes, I'll be there! Please reserve ____ seat(s) at \$50 each (\$25 for students).

____ Sorry, I can't make it, but here's my donation of \$ ____.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

Please send checks, payable to CADP, to: Randy Carney, 1733 High Street, Denver, CO 80218