

DEATH PENALTY ACTION

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COALITION OF 450 ORGANIZATIONS THANKS BIDEN, URGES HIM TO COMMUTE REMAINING SEVEN PRISONERS ON FEDERAL & MILITARY DEATH ROWS

Washington, DC - A coalition of nearly 450 organizations convened by Death Penalty Action delivered a letter via internal White House contacts today, appreciating President Biden's commutations of 37 federal death sentences and urging him to go further by commuting the remaining SEVEN death sentences on federal (3) and military (4) death rows prior to leaving office.

The letter asserts:

"In your statement, you said you granted clemency because you wanted to "prevent the next Administration from carrying out executions." This gives us hope. Unless you finish the job by granting clemency to the three men remaining on federal death row and extending your mercy to the four men on military death row, you will leave those seven men vulnerable to execution under Donald Trump's administration. This would seem counter to your intent."

[Click here](#) to see the full letter as submitted today along with the complete list of endorsing organizations.

Death Penalty Action Board Chair Rev. Sharon Risher, daughter of Ethel Lance and cousin to Susie Jackson and Tywanza Sanders, whose killer is a prisoner on Federal Death Row in the wake of his racially motivated mass shooting at Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC in 2015, also [made a brief video statement which may be seen here](#).

Additionally, in the revised letter the campaign added an endorsement of two related pardon requests. The groups ask President Biden to grant the pardon request of [Billie Allen](#), whose death sentence was commuted and who asserts his innocence, as well as the posthumous pardon request for [Alfred Bourgeois](#). Mr. Bourgeois was executed on December 11, 2020, during the Trump execution spree. His family has presented a credible innocence claim and has written to President Biden requesting a pardon on his behalf. Bourgeois's daughter makes her [video plea here](#).

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS MAY BE QUOTED

"I am happy for all those whose sentences have been commuted, and grateful to President Biden for this unprecedented act of mercy, but this is so unfair. I need the President to understand that when you put a killer

on death row, you also put their victim's families in limbo with the false promise that we must wait until there is an execution before we can begin to heal. Every time this case comes up, I am brought back to the day my mother and cousins were murdered, and I need that to stop. Politics has gotten in the way of mercy. You can't rank victims, Mr. President. I am begging you to finish the job, not only with the three men left on federal death row, but also with those on the military death row. There's still time. Finish the job."

Rev. Sharon Risher

Board Chair, Death Penalty Action

Daughter of Ethel Lance and cousin to Susie Jackson and Tywanza Sanders

"Every person left on the federal and military death rows is being handed over to Donald Trump for execution. Death Penalty Action opposes the death penalty in all cases because it is a failed public policy any way you look at it. The danger of leaving the death penalty as an available tool for Donald Trump to use cannot be overstated. Donald Trump idolizes dictators and relishes dictator-like power. We are absolutely grateful for what President Biden has done, but we urge him to finish the job. Do not give Trump the power to execute anyone."

Abraham Bonowitz

Executive Director, Death Penalty Action

Co-Founder, L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty

"I stood at the finish line of the Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013 after completing the race to wait for my sister to finish her run. I witnessed the bombing. I also witnessed the injured being carried into the medical tent. The visions haunt me today. I was initially thrilled that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev received the death penalty. Today I have changed. I believe he deserves life in prison without parole, and I am disturbed that President Biden has not commuted his death sentence to life without parole."

Former US Congresswoman & current Ohio Representative Jean Schmidt, a leading "pro-life" Republican, witnessed the bombing and for many years was an advocate of the death penalty. She has reversed that position and now opposes the death penalty in all cases.

"Just when I thought Joe Biden was going to give our nation some ethical clarity, he has presented us with a new nightmare...the ranking of murder victims. Either Biden finishes the job and commutes all federal death sentences or we are left in the same place we were before...a moral abyss of federal sentencing that only pursues death sentences in rare cases, prioritizing some murder victims above all others."

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Spiritual Advisor, Death Rows Nationwide

"The thousands of members of L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty applaud President Biden for saving thirty-seven human lives. Still, we lament that he did not extend this to all human beings in line for state murder. Indeed, we are against the death penalty in ALL cases, including for the Tree of Life shooter. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel taught: 'death should never be the answer in a civilized society.' As the torch-bearers to Wiesel's absolutist abolitionist stance, L'chaim members are keenly aware that by leaving open this veritable Pandora's Box - however narrowly - Biden sends an open invitation for the man-made Angel of Death to enter whenever the time is ripe, setting a precedent that inherently devalues human life. Finish the job, Mr. President."

Cantor Michael Zosman

Co-Founder, L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty

"37 is good but 40 is better. No one - not even Dylann Roof — is beyond redemption. We can honor the victims of violence without killing more people. The death penalty does not heal the wounds of violence, it just creates new wounds. It's time to stop killing to try to show that killing is wrong. It is time to end the death penalty, once and for all."

Shane Claiborne
Red Letter Christians

"We Christians follow Jesus, the Prince of Peace -- who, despite being executed by the state himself, still taught us to value forgiveness over revenge. Our Christmas prayer is that President Biden will further echo Christ's example of mercy, and not stain his moral legacy by handing over these seven remaining lives to President-elect Trump's next bloodthirsty execution spree."

The Rev. Nathan Empsall, Executive Director
Faithful America

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

Rev. Risher was a featured speaker on a congressional briefing panel hosted by Rep. Ayanna Pressley on December 10, 2024, in which she made the following statement, which is included in a [new video](#) being shared on social media.

"I learned that my mother and my loved ones were gunned down by a white supremacist trying to start a race war. He is not an innocent man on death row, but he is a man. He has humanity, and I have been willing and worked hard to give forgiveness to [him]. I do not want him to die. To spend the rest of his life in prison? Yes. But not for him to die in the name of my family. We are urging you, President Biden. I hope you hear my words. I hope you get to hear the pain in my voice."

Watch the full panel discussion [here](#). The panel also featured noted death penalty experts, remarks from current federal death row prisoner Billie Allen, who is seeking a pardon from President Biden, his sister Yvette Allen, and Lisa Brown, whose son was Christopher Vialva, who was executed in the federal execution spree in the final six months of the first Trump Administration.

Earlier in the day on December 10, Rev. Risher and Lisa Brown delivered over [36,000 petition signatures](#) and an updated letter, [from over 430 organizations](#), urging President Biden to commute all federal and military death sentences before the end of his term. These deliveries augment the thousands of phone calls being made to the White House during calling hours from 11am to 3pm each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday as part of [the growing campaign](#). These calls will continue to urge President Biden to finish the job, even as the official White House comment line appears to not be functioning "during the holidays." Death Penalty Action members are calling the White House switchboard instead.

Available for Interviews:

- Rev. Sharon Risher, is Board Chair of Death Penalty Action and Daughter of Ethel Lance, whose killer is a prisoner on Federal Death Row in the wake of his racially motivated mass shooting at Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC in 2015.
- Lisa Brown is the mother of Christopher Vialva. She witnessed her son's execution by the federal government on September 24, 2020. See a short video relating her experience [here](#).

- Abraham Bonowitz is co-founder and executive director of Death Penalty Action, which was started in 2017 to ensure protests and public opposition to executions under the Trump Administration. The organization led protests in Terre Haute and Washington, DC at each of the 13 federal executions in 2020 and 2021. Bonowitz was also a leader in protests outside the execution of Timothy McVeigh in 2001. He is the primary architect of Death Penalty Action's campaign to halt federal executions.

Previous versions of the letter had urged President Biden to make good on his campaign pledge to end the federal death penalty, and to work with Congress to pass the Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act sponsored by Rep. Ayanna Pressley and Senator Richard Durbin.

See the [full text of the letter here](#), along with the growing list of more than 430 organizations currently signed on.

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