



OREGON JUSTICE RESOURCE CENTER CALLS ON GOVERNOR TO COMMUTE DEATH SENTENCES

NEW LEGAL MEMO CONFIRMS GOVERNOR'S ABSOLUTE POWER OF CLEMENCY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PORTLAND, Ore. – Oregon Justice Resource Center, a Portland-based nonprofit is calling on Governor Kate Brown to commute the sentences of the 35 people on Oregon’s death row to life without the possibility of parole. The call comes after an academic study of the financial cost of the death penalty that was funded by OJRC revealed death sentences cost Oregon as much as a million dollars more or four times more than life sentences for comparable crimes.

In October, Governor Brown reaffirmed the moratorium on executions that began in 2011 under her predecessor, Governor Kitzhaber, and was continued by her when she took office in 2015. At that time, she was reported as having “serious concerns about the constitutionality and workability of Oregon’s death penalty law.” While the moratorium does prevent anyone being executed in Oregon, cases are still making their way through the appeals process and new death sentences can be issued, so it does not address the financial costs associated with the death penalty.

“The revelation this week about the huge sums being wasted on a death penalty we are not using should give every Oregonian pause for thought,” said Alice Lundell, Director of Communication for OJRC. “Even before the moratorium, Oregon had had only two executions in fifty years, meaning that we’re spending millions of dollars on a system that is not fit for purpose.”

OJRC is urging Governor Brown to take swift and decisive action that will end or greatly reduce the costs associated with the cases of those who are on death row. The organization

believes the time is right for the Governor to commute all Oregon death sentences to life without the possibility of parole.

“The constitution of the State of Oregon, state and federal case law, and our common law tradition make clear that the governor can commute any sentence imposed on someone in Oregon to a lesser sentence of her choosing,” said Lundell. “That includes the people presently on death row.”

“We’re releasing new legal research confirming the governor’s ability to commute sentences. She is able to use her powers of clemency to end the wasteful expense of endless litigation over death penalty cases while still protecting public safety by ensuring none of those who are resentenced to life without the possibility of parole ever leave prison. Since executions are so rare, life without parole is already the effective sentence of those on death row.”

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For more information or interviews, please contact Alice Lundell, Director of Communication, Oregon Justice Resource Center.

Three constitutional law professors are available for interview to comment on the Governor’s absolute power of clemency.