

Utahns for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

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Utahns Say No to the Firing Squad

Salt Lake City, UT - On January 27, from 12:00 – 1:00 pm, Utahns for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (UTADP) will be meeting at the Utah State Capitol Building, outside on the South steps, to “**Say No to the Firing Squad.**” The event is to protest a new bill that would bring back the firing squad as an option for executions in Utah. Members of UTADP and other activists will be available to make comments regarding this proposed bill.

In 2004, after a year of study and debate, the Utah State Legislature repealed the firing squad option. The Utah Sentencing Commission made a unanimous recommendation to do so at that time. Reasons for the repeal included that convicted murderers gained national notoriety due to the negative media frenzy about the method of execution and the victims were forgotten. And, Utah endured widespread condemnation for resorting to this Wild West style method of execution. More than a generation ago, most states abandoned the firing squad as a relic of a more gruesome past.

UTADP believes that bringing back the firing squad is bad policy. The reasons we had ten years ago for repealing the firing squad still apply today, with equal force.

- Bringing back the firing squad will negatively affect Utah’s reputation for moral leadership. Instead, Utah should expect national and international condemnation.
- Convicted murderers will continue to gain notoriety while the victims are forgotten.
- Executions will create media frenzy. Even Rep. Paul Ray, sponsor of this proposed legislation has admitted that the firing squad will bring a “circus atmosphere” to executions in Utah.

At the same time that legislators are debating the firing squad, they will also be discussing ways to reduce the overall prison population and build a new, smaller, smarter state prison. Abolishing the death penalty altogether would provide substantial cost savings for the state—by reducing appeals and eliminating the need to build and staff a death row, among other things. Bringing back the firing squad, on the other hand, means building another room in the new prison that can accommodate rifle fire.

Most importantly, execution by firing squad sends a very graphic message that belies state leaders’ commitment to respecting and protecting all human life.

Utah ended the uses of the firing squad in 2004. Instead of bringing it back, we should take this opportunity to explore alternatives to the death penalty like making life in prison without parole the maximum sentence for murder. That one change would make our system cheaper, faster, and better for the families of victims.

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