

# DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER

1101 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 701, Washington, DC 20005

Phone:(202) 289-2275 ☎ Fax:(202) 289-7336 ☎ Email: [dpic@deathpenaltyinfo.org](mailto:dpic@deathpenaltyinfo.org)

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**CONTACT: Brenda Bowser Soder**

**(202) 289-2275, (301) 906-4460 - cell  
[bbsoder@deathpenaltyinfo.org](mailto:bbsoder@deathpenaltyinfo.org)**

## NEW DPIC REPORT EXAMINES DEATH PENALTY THROUGH JURORS' EXPERIENCES

### *"Blind Justice" Details How Death Penalty Fails Jurors*

WASHINGTON, DC – According a new groundbreaking report issued by the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), a closer look at the experiences of capital juries since the Supreme Court's revision of the system in 1976 reveals a process that shows them little respect. The report, *Blind Justice: Juries Deciding Life and Death With Only Half the Truth*, examines death penalty problems from the perspective of jurors and reveals that they often find themselves at the center of a highly charged courtroom battle where they are treated as pawns, manipulated, and kept in the dark.

Jurors have occupied an esteemed position in America's criminal justice system for centuries. But, according to the report, potential jurors in capital cases are often excluded on the basis of race and for their mainstream views. They are often left in the dark about critical evidence necessary for their life-and-death decisions. Tapping into personal experiences of capital jurors, case examples, academic research, and the latest legal developments surrounding the death penalty in the United States, *Blind Justice* details how the death penalty distorts the justice system from the perspective of jurors.

"In capital cases, some citizens are often excluded because of their personal beliefs or race. For those who do serve, critical information is frequently withheld during the trial. The evidence jurors do hear is often unreliable," explains Richard Dieter, executive director of DPIC. "Jurors' emotions are played upon as the most gruesome aspects of the crime are displayed in graphic detail. The victim's family is often pitted against the defendant and his family. When their service is over, jurors are largely ignored."

*Blind Justice* notes that in many cases, mistakes beyond the control of jurors will later be revealed and their decisions will be overturned. If they have second thoughts after learning new facts about the case, it is often too late for them to affect the case and they may have to live with the possibility that they have sentenced an innocent person to death.

"Going into trial, I wasn't sure where I stood on the death penalty. Today, knowing what I know about wrongful convictions and the kinds of problems that result in putting innocent people's lives on the line, I would no longer vote for a death sentence," explains Kathleen Hawk

Norman, a juror in the trial of Dan Bright, who was later exonerated. “I don’t think many jurors feel comfortable playing Russian Roulette with people’s lives. Jurors are recognizing that life in prison is perhaps the only responsible way to vote.”

As the U.S. nears its 1,000<sup>th</sup> execution since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976, growing juror skepticism about the fairness and accuracy of capital punishment has contributed to a 50 percent decline in death sentences over the past five years. In increasing numbers, jurors are voting for life sentences because of abuses in the system. Jurors are also breaking their silence and beginning to speak out about their experiences. Some have offered affidavits to judges and governors about what they would have done had they known the whole truth. Others are simply working to ensure that future jurors serve under a better system.

In *Blind Justice*, DPIC provides a thorough examination of this issue and introduces readers to jurors who have suddenly found themselves on the front lines of America’s death penalty debate. Their experiences mesh with a growing segment of the American population who believe that the death penalty’s errors are too frequent, its inequities too blatant, its stakes too high, and its complexities too incomprehensible to fit within America’s constitutional principles.

To receive a copy of *Blind Justice* or to arrange an interview with DPIC’s executive director, researchers, or death penalty jurors, please contact Brenda Bowser Soder at [bbsoder@deathpenaltyinfo.org](mailto:bbsoder@deathpenaltyinfo.org) or 202-289-2275.

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