Three people have been executed in Kentucky since the 1976 reinstatement of capital punishment, all of them for aggravated murder. Two of them involved inmates who dropped their appeals and agreed to be executed. The last execution occurred in November 2008.

Since that time, questions related to Kentucky’s lethal injection protocol and other matters have prompted state courts to put executions on hold while the legal issues are addressed. Kentuckians have also learned more about the serious flaws in the state’s capital punishment system, prompting growing support for an official suspension of executions.

In 2011, following an exhaustive two-year review, a report released by the American Bar Association’s Kentucky Assessment Team revealed serious problems related to fairness and accuracy in the use of the death penalty in Kentucky. A poll taken that year found that 62 percent of Kentuckians supported a temporary halt to executions.

Support for a moratorium continues to grow. A poll conducted earlier this year by the University of Kentucky Survey Research Center found that 72.4 percent would support a decision by the governor to halt all executions until problems with the state’s system can be addressed.

Issues related to cost, fairness and the impact on victims’ families also found Kentuckians favoring punishments other than the death penalty.

**Recent Poll Results**

If it were shown that because of the constitutionally mandated appeals and additional trials and housing costs associated with the death penalty that the death penalty costs taxpayers substantially more than sentencing prisoners to life with no possibility of parole would you support or oppose replacing the death penalty with a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole?

- Strongly support: 34.2%
- Strongly oppose: 20.3%
- Somewhat support: 33.9%
- Somewhat oppose: 11.7%

When told of its high cost, 68% of Kentuckians support replacing the death penalty with life without parole

Death penalty cases can drag on for more than a decade, forcing victims’ families to endure years of uncertainty and waiting. In contrast, a sentence of life in prison without parole could offer swift and certain justice that allows victims to move on with the healing process as soon as the trial is over. Murderers need to be severely punished, but Kentucky’s death penalty system isn’t working and should be replaced with life in prison without the possibility of parole.

- Strongly agree: 28.5%
- Somewhat disagree: 17.6%
- Somewhat agree: 43.1%
- Strongly disagree: 10.8%

71.6% of Kentuckians agree that the capital punishment system risks executing the innocent

- Strongly agree: 27.2%
- Somewhat disagree: 18.6%
- Somewhat agree: 36.8%
- Strongly disagree: 17.3%

64% of Kentuckians support replacing the death penalty with a sentence of life without parole

Source: The University of Kentucky Survey Research Center conducted interviews between March 4 and April 30, 2016, with 684 Kentuckians over the age of 18. The poll had a margin of error of + or – 3.8%.
Other Voices

“The ABA review suggests that the death penalty is broken beyond repair in Kentucky. Replacing it with life without parole is the best approach for our state – removing the possibility that an innocent person will be executed, saving limited tax dollars, protecting public safety and providing certainty and justice to the families of victims.”

*Former Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Joseph P. Gutmann*

*Retired Circuit Judge Stephen Ryan*

*Former Commonwealth's Attorney J. Stewart Schneider*

“I oppose the death penalty … because I believe it is illogical for the state to teach citizens not to kill by killing. … Corrections officials are expected to commit the most premeditated murder imaginable.”

*Allan Ault, former Director of Corrections for five governors in three states*

“The long decades of waiting for the justice system to work through all the appeals only rekindles our horror to be relived. Many of us become weary of that anger and wish for some resolution so we might escape living in the past and get back into life.”

*Ben Griffith, whose brother was murdered in 1986*

“It’s counterintuitive, but taxpayers spend far more on our system of capital punishment than we would if the death penalty were not an option. Every study undertaken in the U.S. concludes that our death penalty system is far more costly than a criminal justice system in which the maximum sentence is life without the possibility of parole.”

*State Representative David Floyd, R-Bardstown*