



# News Release

## Contact

600 Clark Ave. Jefferson City, MO 65102

P: (573) 635-7239

F: 573-635-7431

MoCatholic@MoCatholic.org

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Moratorium Now! Takes a Stand at Missouri Capitol

**JEFFERSON CITY, MO, January 22, 2014**—A coalition organized in supporting legislation to halt executions in Missouri gathered on Wednesday, January 21, for a press conference and lobby day at the Missouri Capitol.

Representatives from the Missourians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (MADP), the ACLU of Missouri, the Innocence Project, Missouri Faith Voices, and the NAACP spoke during the press conference. They discussed the flawed death penalty system in Missouri, the need for a moratorium, and urged support of HB 561, sponsored by Representative John Rizzo (D-Kansas City).

The Missouri Catholic Conference works closely with MADP to end the death penalty in Missouri. This is part of the churches effort to promote a culture of life and protect the sanctity and dignity of all human life.

Stephen Saloom, former policy director for the Innocence Project, said that Missouri's death penalty system is flawed and severely needs to be examined.

“Missouri is executing people at a shocking pace, despite the fact that the best legal minds find Missouri's death penalty system riddled with problems that can cause injustices—and even the execution of innocent people,” Saloom said.

House Bill 561 would stop all executions while a commission secures implementation of expert recommendations to promote fairness and accuracy in Missouri's death penalty laws, procedures, and practices. The recommendations came from a 2012 report issued by the Missouri Death Penalty Assessment, comprised of judges, former prosecutors, and defense attorneys. In total, the team proposed over 100 recommendations, none of which have been implemented by the Missouri General Assembly.

“I am convinced that any meaningful discussion about the ultimate penalty must be preceded by a thorough state specific assessment of the accuracy and fairness with which it is applied,” Representative Rizzo said.

Representatives also spoke about the urgency for such legislation in regards to the scheduled execution of Marcellus Williams on Jan. 28. Williams was convicted of a 1998 murder; in the case there is no scientific evidence linking him to the murder, no confession, or eyewitnesses. The limited DNA testing previously performed excludes Williams. His lawyers are requesting that additional DNA testing be done on the trace evidence left at the scene and that it be compared to state and national databases to determine the real culprit in the case.

“Regardless of one's position on the death penalty, nobody would support the execution of an innocent person,” said Rita Linhardt, Missouri Catholic Conference senior staff associate and board member of MADP. “At the very least this execution should be halted until the testing is completed and the results known.”

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During the afternoon, participants were encouraged to lobby their legislators and Governor Nixon regarding the urgency for the passage of HB 561 and the need for moratorium.

*The Bishops of Missouri, speaking together on matters of public policy, form the Missouri Catholic Conference*  
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