

[back to article](#)

## The Gadsden Times

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# Execution to Death Row?

## Tight finances should force states to rethink policy

*Published: Tuesday, June 2, 2009 at 11:19 a.m.*

Glenn Holladay is one of just more than 200 people on death row in Alabama, but he won't be executed. Holladay has been deemed mentally handicapped by the courts and his death sentence overturned. He will be resentenced in Etowah County June 26. U.S. District Judge Robert Propst ordered that "any sentencing will be pursuant to state law except that there will be no sentence to death."

Alabama doesn't spend as much on death penalty cases as some states do — primarily because court-appointed attorneys get ridiculously low payments from the state — but the financial component of death penalty cases is yet another reason to consider doing away with capital punishment.

The state's system of compensating lawyers who are appointed to death penalty cases has been roundly criticized, but the mandated appeal hearings in those cases still cost thousands, maybe even tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Holladay's case has been in and out of the courts several times this decade alone and those actions don't come cheap.

Opponents of the death penalty cite racial inequality issues as one of the flaws of the system and the numbers seem to back that up. The Equal Justice Initiative says nearly 65 percent of all state murders involve black victims, but that 80 percent of the people awaiting execution in Alabama were convicted of crimes in which the victims were white. EJI says only 6 percent of all murders in Alabama involve black defendants and white victims, but more 60 percent of black death row prisoners have been sentenced for killing someone white.

The advent of DNA testing has resulted in several people being freed from death row, and each of those cases has initiated renewed calls for a ban or at least a moratorium on executions.

Several states have done cost analysis of death penalty cases. Tennessee's study found that death penalty cases cost 48 percent more than cases where prosecutors seek life imprisonment. In Arizona, the estimate is that capital punishment costs three times what it does to house an inmate for life. Other studies in other states show similar findings.

In this time of tight finances and reduced revenues for states, even if you are not opposed to capital punishment for moral reasons — and this paper has advocated for such punishment in the past — it's hard to argue for executions from a financial standpoint. Alabama should, at the very least, suspend executions until the

Legislature can consider whether the state should ban them.

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