

Financial Costs of the Death Penalty

Highlights of Report 14-02

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Comprehensive cost data do not exist and creating reasonable estimates would require considerable resources.

Most of the data needed to estimate the financial cost of the death penalty in Idaho is unavailable, only partially available, or not compiled in a way that allows for meaningful comparisons to noncapital cases. For example, many criminal justice stakeholders do not track time spent on capital cases compared with noncapital cases. Collecting necessary data would require a considerable amount of effort and resources from stakeholders.

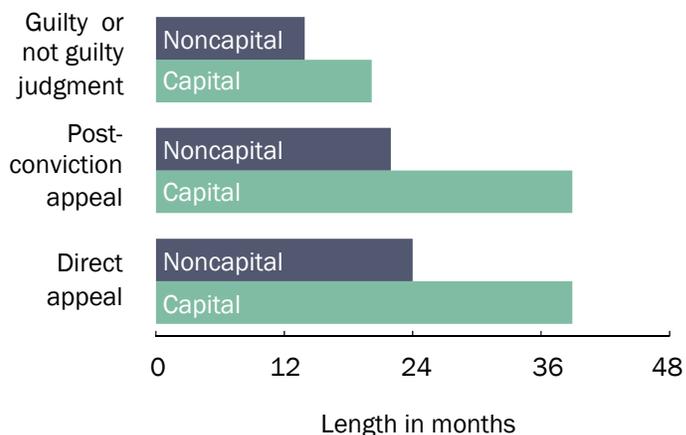
We found that similar cost data limitations are discussed in national literature and other states research. Cost studies performed in other states have used varying methods to estimate death penalty costs, each with their own set of limitations and assumptions.

Research concludes that death penalty cases cost more than life without parole cases.

Regardless of the methods used and any identified limitations or assumptions, studies we reviewed have concluded that the death penalty is more expensive than life without parole, in part because capital cases take longer to resolve than noncapital cases.

Our findings about lengthy case-processing time for death penalty cases align with findings of national research.

Because of the limited availability of cost data, we compared the time taken to resolve capital cases with noncapital cases from 1998 to 2013. Consistent with existing research, we found that capital cases take longer to complete than noncapital cases because of their inherent complexity and added statutory steps.



Few first-degree murder cases are processed as capital cases; of those, very few result in death sentences and even fewer in executions.

Of the 251 first-degree murder cases filed from 1998 to 2013, prosecutors sought the death penalty in 42, and it was imposed in 7. This pattern is also consistent with national research.

Of the 40 offenders sentenced to death since the death penalty was reinstated in 1977

- 21 are no longer sentenced to death
- 12 have active appeals pending
- 4 died in prison
- 3 were executed

Next Steps

A complex, lengthy cost study undertaken in Idaho would likely result in findings similar to those in national and other states research. And like national research, a study specific to Idaho would have its own set of limitations and assumptions.

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