

November 12, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

As faith leaders representing diverse religious communities across the country, we welcomed your campaign promise to end the death penalty at the federal level. Attorney General Garland's July 1, 2021 announcement suspending federal executions is an important step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough to eradicate the racial bias and inequity built into the federal death penalty system. Nor does it prevent a future administration from carrying out an execution spree like we saw begin in 2020.

You have the power to fulfill your promise and prevent further injustice by commuting all federal death sentences. We urge you to do so as soon as possible.

Clearing the federal death row would bring immediate benefits. It would acknowledge and redress the racial bias inherent in a system where 26 of 45 current federal death row prisoners are people of color, including Black men convicted and sentenced to death by all-white juries. It would also acknowledge the human capacity for growth and redemption rather than perpetuating retributive violence. Further, at a time when our communities are reconsidering how best to keep citizens safe, commuting federal death sentences would allow government resources to be used for policies and practices that actually fulfill that goal.

We are painfully aware that every death penalty case involves devastating loss, but we also know that the capital punishment process causes lasting harm to the families of both victims and perpetrators. Commuting all federal death sentences will allow those families to focus on healing instead of living in limbo.

The 13 executions carried out under the prior administration left us horror-struck. Prisoners were executed despite serious concerns about their intellectual disability, mental competence, or the fairness of their trials, as well as about whether the government's execution procedures would inflict excessive pain and suffering. Though lower courts entered stays in many of these cases, the Supreme Court overturned all of them. By commuting the sentences of those on federal death row, you will ensure that no future administration can perpetrate similar injustices.

In 1957, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. explained that "capital punishment is against the better judgment of modern criminology and, above all, against the highest expression of love in the nature of God."

We appeal to you as women and men of faith. The inherent, God given dignity in every human being compels us to promote a culture that values the life of every person. We believe that you, as a person of deep faith, also share those values. Ending the death penalty in the United States will bring us closer to racial reconciliation and closer to a society that fulfills God's promise. Commuting all existing federal death sentences is a powerful incremental step on the road to that goal, a step you can take with the stroke of a pen.

Please, President Biden, clear the federal row now.

Sincerely,

Bishop Timothy J. Clarke
Presiding Bishop
Berean Fellowship of Churches

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Rev. Terri Hord Owens
General Minister - President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Dominique Gilliard
Director of Racial Righteousness and Reconciliation
Evangelical Covenant Church

Bishop Lawrence Reddick
Presiding Bishop
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Colin P. Watson, Sr.
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Rev. Carlos L. Malave
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Rev. David Steele
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Glen Guyton
Executive Director
Mennonite Church USA

Bishop Angel Marcial
Bishop for Latin America
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Rev. Dr. Betsy Miller
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