



January 29, 2010

Dear Community Stakeholders,

The voters of Santa Clara County will be asked to choose a new District Attorney on June 8, 2010. The office of District Attorney is one of the most powerful elected positions in the county--it is the only office with the power of life or death. Now is the time for all interested community members to meet with candidates for District Attorney and to learn their views on issues that impact the people of our county. The Santa Clara County Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty asks you to include the death penalty among the issues you raise with candidates for District Attorney.

**It is not enough to know whether a candidate is for or against the death penalty. The much more important question is how the candidate would use her or his power to seek death if elected.**

Because California doesn't have the money needed to fund investigations, expand crime labs, or relocate witnesses, half of all murders in the state go unsolved. Yet, District Attorneys continue to waste money on the death penalty, even though most people on death row die of old age just like those sentenced to permanent imprisonment. Each time the District Attorney seeks the death penalty, it costs the county \$1 million more than a non-death penalty case, and it costs the state millions more.

In times of tight fiscal budgets, will a candidate for District Attorney be willing to shift limited resources away from costly death penalty prosecutions in favor of more critical needs like re-opening the cold case unit which investigated unsolved homicides? Will a candidate take steps to minimize the money wasted unnecessarily on the death penalty by reducing the number of death penalty prosecutions?

A blue ribbon state commission also found that the risk remains that California will convict and execute an innocent person. Studies show that California's death penalty is applied unfairly based on the race of the victim and economic status. Some victims' family members say the death penalty system causes them more pain, dragging them through decades of appeals that force them to relive the tragedy again and again.

What will a candidate for District Attorney do to reduce the chances of wrongful convictions? Will he or she support shifting resources from death penalty prosecutions to investigating claims of actual innocence? How will he or she ensure that the death penalty is applied fairly in this county? Will he or she listen to murder victims' family members opposed to the death penalty?

These are just some of the complex issues related to the day to day administration of the death penalty in our county which voters should consider. Enclosed, please find a set of suggested questions on the

death penalty which we encourage you to ask candidates for District Attorney before making any decision to endorse any such candidate.

The District Attorney speaks “for the people” in the criminal courts. He or she is supposed to serve the interests of all members of the community and to prosecute the laws without prejudice, bias, or political purposes. When we elect a District Attorney, we hand that person the power to seek death in our name. Now is the time for all members of the community to exercise our power to select a District Attorney who reflects our values and will act in the best interest of our community.

We would be happy to provide a speaker and/or materials if your organization would like to learn more about the death penalty in Santa Clara County. Please contact me at Ellen Kreitzberg at [EKreitzberg@scu.edu](mailto:EKreitzberg@scu.edu). Thank you for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

Ellen Kreitzberg on behalf of  
The Santa Clara County Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty