

July 29, 2009

Stacey Skala Orr, Exec. Dir.
National Association of Social Workers, Oregon Chapter
Stacey@nasworegon.org

Dear Stacey,

In advance of your fall meeting, I am providing a more formal request and invitation to have The National Association of Social Workers-Oregon (NASW-Oregon) involved as a “supporting organization” to Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (OADP) We are eager to include your organization with the growing list of secular and faith communities that are publicly voicing their concerns about the death penalty. We hope to advance our mutual interests in making Oregon a better, more-peaceful, healthier and more tolerant place.

I am writing to you regarding our efforts to rid Oregon of its death penalty. The over-arching organization leading the effort for repeal is Oregonians with Alternatives to the Death Penalty (OADP). One of our strategies to further our cause is to ally with as many like-minded organizations as possible. We are most interested in partnering with organizations that work on a wide variety of social concerns. I believe that **The National Association of Social Workers, Oregon Chapter**, is an organization committed to the same purpose.

Oregon is one of 35 states that still have death penalty laws and it requires a vote of the people to change those laws here. Therefore, there is quite a bit of organizing that must be done to inform and mobilize people toward such actions.

One of the many reasons to abolish the death penalty is the fact that the administration of these laws is **biased against the poor**. The death penalty laws directly impact so many of the vulnerable populations with whom NASW-OR already works, in your own initiatives of working to improve behavioral health, focus on children and families and an overall healthy society. While less than 2% of those convicted of capital murder get the death penalty, all of those that do are poor, many have families and so many have struggled with mental health issues.

We want NASW-Oregon be a part of our efforts. I have attached an outline of how we plan to proceed with organizations and recruit them as “Supporting Organizations”.

I believe that Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty will benefit from NASW’s decision to join forces along with other supporting organizations. I also believe that there are several benefits to you and your members.

- **When you join as a “Supporting Organization” you will be allied with other organizations such as ACLU, Amnesty International, Fellowship for Reconciliation, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Physicians for Social Responsibility, health organizations and many others that are currently being signed up.**

- **Being displayed with these other well-know organizations on our web site and in our literature and newsletter(s), shows that the NASW-Oregon is thriving and totally engaged in work that improves the lives of disenfranchised people.**
- **The meetings, training sessions and rallies forthcoming will give your members opportunities to participate with other progressive people who are working toward restorative justice.**
- **Bringing like-minded individuals and organizations together provides an exciting cross-pollination which energizes and enhances everyone's work.**

Stacey, I have also attached an example proclamation that could be a model for NASW-OR. We are gaining traction with many Oregonians and organizations in this state. We will be pleased and honored to have NASW-Oregon be a part of this coalition.

Peace,

Ron Steiner
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Draft of sample proclamation:

The Oregon Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers proclaims a position advocating abolition of the Oregon death penalty.

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and to help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. An historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society.

Social workers promote social justice and social change. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, research and evaluation. Since the core values of social workers include social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, and service, we strongly believe that advocating abolition of the death penalty in Oregon is within the principals of our profession.

Included in the many reasons that we oppose the death penalty are:

- The death penalty runs counter to our mission of promoting individual well-being in a social context and the overall well-being of society.
- A death penalty fosters a culture of violence and suggests that the way to settle scores is through violence.
- Social Workers' core values to acknowledge the worth, value and dignity of every human being, cannot coexist with the impact of the death penalty.
- The death penalty has proven to be biased against the poor. The poor and vulnerable are the very people that are central to our mission
- All the studies and statistics show that the death penalty is **NOT** a deterrent to violent crime.
- The death penalty puts innocent people at risk of being executed. This is evidenced by the fact that (as of this date) there have been 135 exonerations of innocent people who have served an average of more than 17 years on death rows, in spite of their innocence.
- Maintaining a death penalty is a very expensive burden to taxpayers. This financial burden takes resources away from human services to children, victim's families and rehabilitation programs for violent offenders, all people social workers are dedicated to assist.
- The death penalty psychologically harms those whom the state commissions to execute others.

Therefore, the Oregon Chapter of The National Association of Social Workers opposes the death penalty. We urge all of our members and the citizens of Oregon to help in the effort to abolish the death penalty. (Stacey, maybe there is something more specific that you can say here.)

