



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 5, 2021

African American Pastors Call for Abolishing the Death Penalty as a Step Toward Addressing the Historical Sins of Slavery and Lynching in Virginia

Press conference, Thursday, January 7, 2021,
10:00am ([Zoom link](#))

RICHMOND – On Thursday, Jan. 7, at 10 am, six African American faith leaders will come together for a virtual press conference ([Zoom link](#)) to call on legislators to abolish the death penalty in Virginia.

Their message: **If Virginia values Black lives, it must repeal its death penalty.** The death penalty is part of Virginia’s horrific legacy of lynching, slavery, and Jim Crow laws. In the 1800’s, Virginia responded to an increased number of lynchings by promising to use the death penalty. This is reflected today in Virginia’s death row which is 100% African American.

Virginia’s death penalty continues a shameful history that devalues African American lives and makes other harsh sentences seem merciful. Join us for a deep conversation about the racial justice issues surrounding the death penalty.

This is the year Virginia legislators can finally abolish the death penalty. Virginia has a long and sordid history of killing people. The first execution the U.S. occurred in Virginia in 1608. Since then, almost 1400 people have been executed in Virginia – more than any other state. This taking of human life can and should end. The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, the Commonwealth’s largest faith-based justice advocacy organization, has made abolition of the death penalty a top priority for the upcoming General Assembly that begins on January 13th.

Faith leaders will address: the history of the death penalty in Virginia, the shift from lynchings to state sanctioned executions, racial bias in the criminal justice system, the ‘cost’ of the death penalty, and the spiritual importance of abolition.

PASTORS CALL FOR AN END TO THE DEATH PENALTY IN VIRGINIA



They call on the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *“I do not think that God approves the death penalty for any crime, rape and murder included. Capital punishment is against the better judgment of modern criminology, and, above all, against the highest expression of love in the nature of God.”*

Senator Scott Surovell (D, 36th) is the lead patron and Senator Bill Stanley (R, 20th) is the chief co-patron of a bill to abolish the death penalty in Virginia in the upcoming General Assembly which begins on January 13, 2021.

PRESS CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. LaKeisha Cook, Justice Reform Organizer, VA Interfaith Center for Public Policy

Rev. Dr. Duane Hardy - Co-Chairperson of Social Justice Committee of Henrico Ministers' Conference; Senior Pastor Seven Pines Baptist Church

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Harris - President of Baptist Ministers Conference Richmond and Vicinity; Senior Pastor Jerusalem Baptist Church

Rev. Dr. Keith Jones - President of Tidewater Metro Baptist Ministers' Conference; Senior Pastor Shiloh Baptist Church

Rev. James Page - Co-Chairperson of VA UMC Conference Board of Church and Society; Senior Pastor, Galloway United Methodist Church

Rev. Dr. Marvin D. Warner - President Danville Ministers' Alliance; Assistant Pastor North Hope Baptist Church

RESOURCES

[Legislative Fact Sheet](#)

[Racial Justice Fact Sheet](#)

[News Story – Associated Press](#)

[Petition to Legislators](#)

[Faith Leaders Petition to Legislators](#)

MEDIA CONTACT

Roberta Oster

Communications Director, [Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy](#)

Roberta@virginiainterfaithcenter.org, Cell: (804) 615-4192

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy advocates economic, racial, social, and environmental justice in Virginia's policies and practices through education, prayer, and action.

VICPP is a non-partisan coalition of more than 750 faith communities working for a more just society.