



## Media Advisory

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### Death Row Family Members, Exonerated Prisoners to discuss Broader Impacts of Capital Punishment

Dallas – As new death sentences and executions continue at record lows in Texas, a group of murder victim family members continues its two-week tour of Texas with private talks in high schools and colleges throughout the state. A panel discussion featuring several men who faced execution and were later exonerated and freed, as well as two mothers of men on death row will take place in Dallas at Southern Methodist University at 7pm on Friday, October 20. The documentary art of Texas photographers John Holbrook and Scott Langley will be on display. This event is free and open to the public.

**Broader Impacts of Capital Punishment: A Journey of Hope Event**  
**Friday, October 20 at 7 PM - 9 PM CDT**  
**306 Dallas Hall, Southern Methodist University**  
**3225 University Blvd., Dallas TX 75205**

Speakers on the panel include Marilyn Shankle-Grant, whose son Paul Storey is on Texas death row. Also presenting are Terri Steinberg, mother of a man sentenced to death in Virginia, Derrick Jamison, who served 20 years on Ohio's death row for a crime he did not commit, and George White, who was wrongly convicted in Alabama.

#### BACKGROUND

The Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing is led by murder victim family members who oppose the death penalty, joined by the families of prisoners on death row and exonerated death row survivors who share their voices of experience with the aftermath of murder. This is the sixth time the Journey of Hope is touring Texas since 1998, and features stops in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin between October 13 and 19.

“We can be safe from dangerous offenders and hold them accountable without killing them,” said [Ami Lyn White](#), whose pregnant mother was murdered in Alvin in 1986. “I can’t speak for everyone who struggles with the aftermath of murder, but our experience is that having to wait a decade or more for an execution that may never come is not conducive to healing. I have no problem with a sentence of death by incarceration, which is what most killers get these days anyway.”

In addition to Texans, the two week series of public events features speakers with compelling stories from across the United States.

“We feel that our message that the death penalty prevents healing and only creates more victims has helped reduce the desire for executions in Texas,” said Bill Pelke, founder of the Journey of Hope ...From Violence to Healing. “Certainly, there has been a significant turnaround in public opinion. The first time we came here in 1998, executions we’re at an all-time high, with nearly 100 each year, and 75% of people in Harris County supported the death penalty. Dozens of executions were in Texas, and many of those cases were from Harris County. Now, only 25% of the people in Harris County support executions, and the vast majority of killers in Texas get the alternative sentence of life without parole. One thing we know from experience is that when there is no death sentence in your case, the healing process begins a lot sooner.”

“The death penalty is a distraction from the real needs of victim families,” continued Pelke. “Most cases are not eligible for execution, but anyone with a relative who has been murdered wants the right person to be caught and held accountable. We include exonerated death row survivors on our tours because wrongful convictions are a real problem. It hurts victim family members even more when we learn that all this time we were focusing our anger on the wrong person. And to think they might have been killed in our names? That’s unacceptable.”

Pelke supported the death penalty for the girl who killed his grandmother, but then he came to understand the healing power of forgiveness. This experience and that of others on the Journey of Hope tour provide the opportunity for the public to look at crime and punishment from different perspectives, including that of the families of killers.

“I also recognize that those in prison or on death row and those who have been executed have families too,” added White. “Those family members, especially those who were children when their loved one was arrested, experience pain and devastation similar to that which I felt. They, like me, didn’t do anything wrong, but society need not make it worse by making them homicide survivors too.”

Three speakers on the tour have brothers who faced execution, including David Kaczynski who helped the FBI determine his brother Ted Kaczynski was the Unabomber, resulting in his apprehension. The juxtaposition of Kaczynski with Bill Babbitt is exposes issues of racism in the system which remain pervasive. Babbitt realized his brother Manny, a Vietnam veteran with diagnosed mental illnesses including PTSD, had killed a woman. He helped the police

apprehend Manny on the promise of treatment. Instead, Manny was executed. The Babbitts are African American. Also on the tour is Randy Gardner, whose brother was the most recent person executed by firing squad in the United States.

The arts have been incorporated into some of the events. A photo display by Texas native [Scott Langley](#) will travel with the tour, and several of the events feature award-winning films. The Texas premiere of "[The Gathering](#)" was featured at the kickoff event on October 14<sup>th</sup>. Another award-winning film, "[Last Day of Freedom](#)," was screen in Houston and will also be screened in San Antonio. That film tells the story of Bill Babbitt and his Vietnam veteran brother Manny, who was executed after Bill turned him in on the promise that Manny would be treated, not killed.

EDITORS/PRODUCERS: Tour speakers are immediately available for advance interviews and live programs.

Tour dates, public event details, speaker bios, and additional information:  
[www.DeathPenaltyAction.org/JourneyofHope](http://www.DeathPenaltyAction.org/JourneyofHope).