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On World Day Against the Death Penalty, Advocates Urge Governor Newsom to End “The Other Death Penalty” of Life Without Parole by Granting Commutations

SACRAMENTO, CA—On the heels of a [United Nations complaint](#) submitted September 15th calling for the abolition of “Death by Incarceration” sentencing across the United States, the Drop LWOP (Life Without Parole) Coalition and dozens of partners are demanding that Governor Newsom reject all forms of death sentencing in California. The governor could do so by granting commutations to the 5,200+ people in California prisons with an LWOP sentence, allowing them the opportunity to be reviewed by the Board of Parole.

October 10 marks the 20th annual World Day Against the Death Penalty, which mobilizes a worldwide community of political leaders, lawyers, and advocates to raise awareness and opposition to the death penalty. While Governor Newsom is a longtime opponent of the death penalty, placing a moratorium on the practice in 2019 and announcing earlier this year that it will be dismantled altogether, his office has never been outspoken about life without parole sentencing and has only commuted 38 people with LWOP since taking office (for context, Governor Brown commuted 143 serving LWOP in 2018 alone).

“We applaud Governor Newsom for his principled commitment to ending the death penalty, but it is time for him to take the same stance on LWOP. He has acknowledged publicly that ending up on Death Row has more to do with your wealth and race than your guilt or innocence — and the same goes for LWOP,” said Susan Bustamante, an organizer with the California Coalition for Women Prisoners whose LWOP sentence was commuted under Governor Brown.

“Governor Newsom has the power to give those serving ‘the other death penalty’ a second chance with the stroke of a pen,” said Michelle Tran, chair of Families United to End LWOP, whose husband is currently serving the sentence. “All we are asking for is hope. All people deserve the chance to demonstrate their growth and change to the parole board, the rehabilitation they’ve committed themselves to even while condemned to death. Across the board people coming home from this sentence are successful contributors to their communities.”

The United States’ LWOP population makes up [more than 80 percent](#) of those under the sentence worldwide, and California is one of five states driving this disproportionate figure. California [accounts for almost 10% of LWOP sentences in the US and 37% of youth serving LWOP in the US.](#)

“The LWOP sentence targets Black and Brown people, young people, and survivors of domestic violence who are criminalized for the actions of others. It is an inhumane sentence that tortures people slowly until they die in prison. I am so grateful that Governor Newsom gave me a second chance, but there are so many just like me who also deserve commutation,” said Chyrl Lamar, board member with Felony Murder Elimination Project formerly sentenced to LWOP and released by the Board of Parole in December 2020.