



Memorandum

To: Members of the Arizona State 56th Legislature

From: Gillian Mccomeskey, Cold Case and Missing Person Project (DPAA)

Date: 22 March 2024

Re: Funding Allocation to Support Victims and Missing People

Executive Summary:

As of 2023, Arizona is one of the top 15 states for pursuing the death penalty while simultaneously being fourth in the nation for the number of cold cases. Arizona has the ability to reallocate resources from a broken system to prioritize solving cases and giving the victims the resources they need to heal.

The state of Arizona is facing a critical budgeting crisis. According to AZMirror, “ Law enforcement budget cuts also came at a time as lockdowns left many cities and states facing severe shortfalls while also dealing with a public health emergency”. There is a massive need to prioritize solving cases and spread awareness of missing people while funding agencies that provide critical support to impacted citizens. As of 2023, there have been over 700 cases in the state of Arizona that went cold due to a lack of funding, awareness, and diligence.¹

Background & Methodology:

While the death penalty was created as a deterrent for murder there is no proof that the sentence deters criminals. According to the National Academy of Sciences, “Research on the deterrent effect of capital punishment is uninformative about whether capital punishment increases, decreases, or has no effect on homicide rates.”² There is little to no difference in crime rates between states with the death penalty and states without. In the state of Arizona, “ It costs an average of \$2 million more per case to execute

¹ More than 700 homicide cases in Arizona remain unsolved:

<https://www.abc15.com/news/state/more-than-700-homicide-cases-in-arizona-remain-unsolved>

²5 Things About the Deterrence: <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/247350.pdf>

someone than to keep them incarcerated. Capital trials are up to four times as expensive as trials resulting in life imprisonment.” According to the Arizona Capitol³ Times.

The state can alleviate the massive burden on local communities, such as indigenous communities that have to rely on their community members to solve crimes due to a lack of trust in law enforcement. The paucity of distrust stems from “Consistent delays in services or instances of abuse by officers. Police abusing their power mixed with low expectations of law enforcement cause both a lack of reporting and of prospective police officers”⁴. With a police budget in Gila County being \$248,000⁵ and with none of that money allocated to victims' services, this demonstrates funding neglect for victims and their families in areas already lacking enough social services.

Recommendations:

Given the evident state budgetary situation, it's undeniable that there's potential for reallocation of funds. With the millions of dollars that are invested into just one death sentence and a policy that has not been proven to reduce violent crime, there is an opportunity to support and fund effective violence prevention programs and victims' support resources by shifting money away from capital punishment. While some counties like Gila only have a \$248,741 police budget that inadequately supports victims, others like Apache County, comparable in size and population to Gila, have a significant police budget of \$9,476,290. This imbalance creates disparities in resources, particularly evident in support for cold cases and missing person units.

Conclusion:

In summary, Arizona has neglected critical issues such as addressing cold cases and providing sufficient funding for victim support. This disregard disproportionately affects rural and indigenous communities. Adequate funding for agencies is urgently needed to ensure justice for victims. Reallocating funds to law enforcement rather than leaving marginalized groups unsupported is unjust and places undue burdens on communities. With proper funding, these institutions can effectively carry out their duties.

³ The Indigenous Justice System: How Underfunding is Failing Tribal Police: <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2023/12/19/the-indigenous-justice-system-how-underfunding-is-failing-tribal-police/#:~:text=Strong%20negative%20perceptions#%20of%20law,and%20of%20prospective%20police%20officers.>

⁴ The Indigenous Justice System: How Underfunding is Failing Tribal Police: <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2023/12/19/the-indigenous-justice-system-how-underfunding-is-failing-tribal-police/>

⁵ Expenses by Department Fiscal Year 2024: https://cms3.revize.com/revize/qilaaz/8016_Schedules%20A-G.pdf