



MINISTRY
AGAINST THE
DEATH
PENALTY

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Statement from Sister Helen Prejean on Oklahoma's Decision to Resume Executions

Oklahoma has a sordid history when it comes to the death penalty.

Clayton Lockett died as a result of an horrific, bloody, botched execution in April 2014. In January 2015, Charles Warner was executed with a food preservative chemical instead of the lethal injection drug specified under Oklahoma law. The government kept this fact secret until it almost did it again, on its third, abortive attempt to execute Richard Glossip—a demonstrably innocent man.

After this series of disasters, Oklahoma stopped all executions. In 2016, a multi-county grand jury issued a blistering report about the incompetence and indifference that is rife within Oklahoma's criminal justice and death penalty systems. In 2017, a bipartisan group formed the Oklahoma Death Penalty Review Commission and unanimously recommended a halt to all executions "until significant reforms have been accomplished." The Commission recommended dozens of reforms that the government chose not to implement.

In the meantime, Oklahoma flirted with the idea of using nitrogen hypoxia, an experimental method, to replace its lethal drug cocktail. That proved to be a vain endeavor. So, having secured a new source of drugs, the government is returning to its tried-and-failed lethal injection protocol.

This is the backdrop for today's announcement by Governor Stitt, Attorney General Hunter, and Corrections Director Crow. They are attempting to revive a shambolic system that has been a source of shame for the state.

The verdict is already in on Oklahoma's death penalty system. It is deeply flawed, and run by a government that cannot be trusted with the ultimate punishment. Oklahomans deserve better than this reckless plan.

Sister Helen Prejean is known around the world for her tireless work against the death penalty and her bestselling book Dead Man Walking. Her organization, the Ministry Against the Death Penalty, is based in New Orleans but its reach is both national and international.

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