

OUR EDITORIAL

Another wrongful conviction begs for end to death penalty

Moline man should have conviction reversed

Darrel Parker of Moline spent much of his life attempting to clear his name after his wrongful murder conviction for the Dec. 14, 1955, death of his wife.



Parker

A blessing in this awful story: He wasn’t executed for the crime that occurred when he lived in Lincoln, Neb., 55 years ago. Instead, he received a life prison term, which he served until parole, when he moved to the Quad-Cities to start over.

A story in Monday’s Times detailed his struggle to clear his name even after a felon’s confession and a governor’s pardon. Still, his conviction stands in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Nebraska prosecutors who believe in justice should seek the reversal of that conviction immediately.

Count Parker among the hundreds of individuals wrongfully convicted of murder. Deathpenalty-info.org lists 138 individuals freed from death row for wrongful convictions. Those staggering numbers and Parker’s case affirm that mistakes happen in felony prosecutions. Regularly.

Parker’s tragic story shows that with perseverance, the truth can come out and justice can prevail.

But not with a death penalty.

116 EXONERATED IN ILLINOIS

Northwestern University’s Center for Wrongful Convictions lists felony case exonerations in 44 states, including 116 Illinois cases and three Iowa cases. Read more at law.northwestern.edu/wrongfulconvictions/

Had Nebraska sought the death penalty, as it has in 41 cases, the truth of Parker’s case could not produce justice.

Death penalty supporters mistakenly credit the punishment for its deterrent effect. Yet even in Nebraska, half of death penalty sentences don’t result in death. According to the Nebraska Department of Corrections, 15 of the 41 sentenced to die were furloughed, or had the sentence commuted or vacated. Another eight remain on appeal. Just 16 of those 41 actually died.

Illinois continues its death penalty charade. The law remains and some prosecutors still seek it. But a moratorium enacted by former Gov. George Ryan remains in effect, largely because of so many death penalty mistakes. Illinois legislators should end this charade as quickly as possible so that prosecutors cease the expensive and futile prosecutions and focus instead on effective and enforceable life prison terms for the worst offenders.

Iowa has no death penalty and lawmakers so far have wisely avoided resurrecting this irreversible injustice.

Mistakes happen in criminal court. Life prison terms, like Parker’s, allow mistakes to be rectified. The death penalty does not.