



**M-1
Tort Claims Act**

**M-2
Death Penalty in
Kansas**

**M-3
Kansas Administrative
Procedure Act**

**M-4
Sex Offenders and
Sexually Violent
Predators**

**M-5
Judicial Selection**

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Judiciary

M-2 Death Penalty in Kansas

Background

On June 29, 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Furman v. Georgia*, 408 U.S. 238 (1972), held the imposition and execution of the death penalty, or capital punishment, in the cases before the court constituted cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments. Justice Potter Stewart remarked that the death penalty was “cruel and unusual in the same way that being struck by lightning is cruel and unusual.” That case nullified all capital sentences imposed without statutory guidelines.

In the following four years, states enacted new death penalty laws aimed at overcoming the court’s *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty. Several statutes mandated bifurcated trials, with separate guilt and sentencing phases, and imposed standards to guide the discretion of juries and judges in imposing capital sentences. In *Gregg v. Georgia*, 428 U.S. 153 (1976), the Court upheld the capital sentencing schemes of Georgia, Florida, and Texas. The Court found that these states’ capital sentencing schemes provided objective criteria to direct and limit the sentencing authority’s discretion, provided mandatory appellate review of all death sentences, and allowed the judge or jury to take into account the character and record of an individual defendant.

The death penalty was reenacted in Kansas, effective on July 1, 1994. Governor Joan Finney allowed the bill to become law without her signature.

The Kansas Supreme Court, in *State v. Marsh*, 278 Kan. 520, 534–535, 102 P. 3d 445, 458 (2004), held that the Kansas death penalty statute was facially unconstitutional. The court concluded that the statute’s weighing equation violated the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments of the *U.S. Constitution* because, “[i]n the event of equipoise, i.e., the jury’s determination that the balance of any aggravating circumstances and any mitigating circumstances weighed equal, the death penalty would be required.” *Id.*, at 534, 102 P. 3d, at 457. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed the Kansas Supreme Court’s judgment and held the Kansas capital sentencing statute is constitutional. In June 2006, the Court found that the Kansas death penalty statute satisfies the constitutional mandates of *Furman* and its progeny because it “rationally narrows the class of death-eligible defendants and permits a jury to consider any mitigating evidence relevant to its sentencing determination. It does

not interfere, in a constitutionally significant way, with a jury's ability to give independent weight to evidence offered in mitigation."

Kansas Capital Murder Crime

In Kansas, the capital murder crimes for which the death penalty can be invoked include the following:

- Intentional and premeditated killing of any person in the commission of kidnapping, or aggravated kidnapping, when the kidnapping or aggravated kidnapping was committed with the intent to hold the person for ransom;
- Intentional and premeditated killing of any person under a contract or agreement to kill that person or being a party to the contract killing;
- Intentional and premeditated killing of any person by an inmate or prisoner confined to a state correctional institution, community correctional institution or jail or while in the custody of an officer or employee of a state correctional institution, community correctional institution or jail;
- Intentional and premeditated killing of the victim of one of the following crimes in the commission of, or subsequent to, the crime of rape, criminal sodomy, or aggravated criminal sodomy, or any attempt thereof;
- Intentional and premeditated killing of a law enforcement officer;
- Intentional and premeditated killing of more than one person as a part of the same act or transaction or in two or more acts or transactions connected together or constituting parts of a common scheme or course of conduct; or
- Intentional and premeditated killing of a child under the age of 14 in the commission of kidnapping, or aggravated kidnapping, when the kidnapping or aggravated kidnapping was committed with intent to commit a sex offense upon or with the child or with the intent that the child commit or submit to a sex offense.

According to Kansas law, upon conviction of a defendant of capital murder, there will be a separate proceeding to determine whether the defendant shall be sentenced to death. This proceeding will be conducted before the trial jury as soon as practicable. If the jury finds, beyond a reasonable doubt, that one or more aggravating circumstances exist and that such aggravating circumstances are not outweighed by any mitigating circumstances which are found to exist, then by unanimous vote, the defendant will be sentenced to death. The Kansas Supreme Court will automatically review the conviction and sentence of a defendant sentenced to death.

If mitigating circumstances outweigh the aggravating circumstances, a defendant convicted of capital murder will not be given a death sentence but will be sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. A defendant sentenced to life without the possibility of parole is not eligible for parole, probation, assignment to a community correctional services program, conditional release, post-release supervision, or suspension, modification, or reduction of sentence.

Costs

Costs in Kansas death penalty cases have been examined in a 2003 Performance Audit by the Legislative Division of Post Audit and in 2004 and 2014 reports by the Kansas Judicial Council Death Penalty Advisory Committee. Each of these studies indicates costs for death penalty cases tend to be higher than non-death penalty cases at the trial and appellate stages. For instance, the 2014 Judicial Council report indicated that Board of Indigents' Defense Services costs in death penalty trial cases filed between 2004 and 2011 averaged \$395,762 per case, as compared to \$98,963 per trial case where the death penalty could have been sought but was not. More detail regarding the costs in death penalty cases can be found in the 2003 Performance Audit report and in the 2004 and 2014 Judicial Council reports, which are available on the Post Audit and Judicial Council websites, respectively.

The Kansas Board of Indigents' Defense Services has three units that participate in the defense of

capital cases. The approved budget for these units in FY 2015 will be \$1,093,211. Actual expenditures for the unit in FY 2014 were \$1,185,400.

Death Penalty and Intellectual Disability

At the national level, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Atkins v. Virginia*, 536 U.S. 304 (2002), stated that capital punishment of those with “mental retardation” is cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment of the *U.S. Constitution*. Various states subsequently attempted to draft legislation that would comply with the *Atkins* decision. In the *Atkins* decision, there is no definition of “mentally retarded,” but the Court referred to a national consensus regarding mental retardation.

[Note: In 2012, the Legislature passed Sub. for SB 397, which replaced statutory references to “mental retardation” and similar terms with “intellectual disability,” and directed state agencies to update their terminology accordingly. Thus, the concept of “mental retardation” as addressed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Atkins* will be discussed here as “intellectual disability.”]

Currently, Kansas law defines “intellectual disability” in the death penalty context to mean a person having significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning to an extent which substantially impairs one’s capacity to appreciate the criminality of one’s conduct or to conform one’s conduct to the requirements of law. See KSA 21-6622(h).

Under Kansas law, counsel for a defendant convicted of capital murder, or the warden or sheriff having custody of the defendant, may request the court to determine if the defendant

has an intellectual disability. The court shall then conduct proceedings to determine if the defendant has an intellectual disability. If the court determines the defendant has an intellectual disability, no sentence of death, life without the possibility of parole, or mandatory term of imprisonment shall be imposed. See KSA 21-6622.

Death Penalty and Minors

In *Roper v. Simmons*, 543 U.S. 551 (2005), the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated the death penalty for all juvenile offenders. The majority opinion pointed to teenagers’ lack of maturity and responsibility, greater vulnerability to negative influences, and incomplete character development, concluding that juvenile offenders assume diminished culpability for their crimes.

A provision in current Kansas law declares that if a defendant in a capital murder case was less than 18 years of age at the time of the commission of the crime, the court shall sentence the defendant as otherwise provided by law, and no sentence of death shall be imposed. As a result of KSA 21-6618, cited here, the death penalty or capital punishment cannot be imposed on a minor in Kansas.

Method of Carrying Out Death Penalty

The method of carrying out a sentence of death in Kansas will be by intravenous injection of a substance or substances in sufficient quantity to cause death in a swift and humane manner pursuant to KSA 22-4001. No death penalty sentence has been carried out in Kansas since it was reenacted in 1994.

Inmates in Kansas Under Sentence of Death

Defendant's Name	Race	Birth	Date Capital Penalty Imposed	County	Case Status
James Craig Kahler	White	Jan. 15, 1963	Oct. 11, 2011	Osage	Appeal Pending
Justin Eugene Thurber	White	Mar. 14, 1983	Mar. 20, 2009	Cowley	Appeal Pending
Scott Dever Cheever	White	Aug. 19, 1981	Jan. 23, 2008	Greenwood	See below
Sidney John Gleason	Black	Apr. 22, 1979	Aug. 28, 2006	Barton	See below
Douglas Stephen Belt	White	Nov. 19, 1961	Nov. 17, 2004	Sedgwick	Appeal Pending
John Edward Robinson, Sr.	White	Dec. 27, 1943	Jan. 21, 2003	Johnson	Appeal Pending
Jonathan Daniel Carr	Black	Mar. 30, 1980	Nov. 15, 2002	Sedgwick	See below
Reginald Dexter Carr, Jr.	Black	Nov. 14, 1977	Nov. 15, 2002	Sedgwick	See below
Gary Wayne Kleypas	White	Oct. 8, 1955	Mar. 11, 1998	Crawford	Appeal Pending

On November 17, 2004, the death sentence of Stanley Elms of Sedgwick County was vacated pursuant to a plea agreement. He was removed from administrative segregation and sentenced to the Hard 40 term, which is life in prison with no possibility of parole for 40 years.

On April 3, 2009, the death sentence of Michael Marsh of Sedgwick County was vacated pursuant to a plea agreement. He was removed from administrative segregation and sentenced to two life sentences, with parole eligibility after 55 years, but with 85 months to serve for additional convictions if paroled.

On March 24, 2010, the death sentence of Gavin Scott of Sedgwick County was vacated pursuant to a plea agreement. He was removed from administrative segregation and sentenced to two life sentences.

In 2010, a Shawnee County district judge granted Phillip D. Cheatham, Jr., who was under sentence of death, a new sentencing hearing. In January 2013, before this hearing was held, the Kansas Supreme Court found Cheatham's trial counsel was ineffective, reversed Cheatham's convictions, and remanded the case for a new trial.

In August 2012, the Kansas Supreme Court reversed the capital murder convictions of Scott Dever Cheever and ordered the case remanded for a new trial. Cheever was under sentence of

death for the convictions. The State appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which issued an opinion December 11, 2013, vacating the judgment of the Kansas Supreme Court and remanding the case for further consideration by Kansas courts of possible error under the Fifth Amendment or Kansas evidentiary rules. The Kansas Supreme Court heard further oral argument in September 2014. As of October 2014, Cheever was being held in special management at Lansing Correctional Facility.

In July 2014, the Kansas Supreme Court vacated death sentences in three cases. The Court vacated Sidney John Gleason's death sentence and remanded for resentencing. In the appeals of Jonathan Daniel Carr and Reginald Dexter Carr, Jr., the Court reversed all but one of each defendant's capital murder convictions, vacated each defendant's death sentence for the remaining capital murder conviction, and remanded to the district court for further proceedings. In October 2014, Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court for a writ of *certiorari* in all three cases.

As of October 2014, nine inmates under a death penalty sentence are being held in administrative segregation because Kansas does not technically have a death row. Inmates under sentence of death (other than Cheever) are held in administrative segregation at the El Dorado Correctional Facility (EDCF).

State-to-State Comparison

Kansas is one of 32 states that has a death penalty. The two following tables show the states with a death penalty and the 18 states without such penalty.

Jurisdictions with the Death Penalty				
Alabama	Georgia	Missouri	Oklahoma	Utah
Arizona	Idaho	Montana	Oregon	Virginia
Arkansas	Indiana	Nebraska	Pennsylvania	Washington
California	Kansas*	Nevada	South Carolina	Wyoming
Colorado	Kentucky	New Hampshire*	South Dakota	Plus U.S. Government
Delaware	Louisiana	North Carolina	Tennessee	U.S. Military*
Florida	Mississippi	Ohio	Texas	

*Indicates jurisdiction with no executions since 1976.

Jurisdictions without the Death Penalty (year abolished in parentheses)		
Alaska (1957)	Massachusetts (1984)	North Dakota (1973)
Connecticut* (2012)	Michigan (1846)	Rhode Island (1984)
Hawaii (1948)	Minnesota (1911)	Vermont (1964)
Illinois (2011)	New Jersey (2007)	West Virginia (1965)
Iowa (1965)	New Mexico**(2009)	Wisconsin (1853)
Maine (1887)	New York (2007)	District of Columbia (1981)
Maryland (2013)***		

*In April 2012, Connecticut voted to abolish the death penalty. The repeal was not retroactive, which left 11 people on the state's death row.

**In March 2009, New Mexico repealed the death penalty. The repeal was not retroactive, which left two people on the state's death row.

***In May 2013, Maryland abolished the death penalty. The repeal was not retroactive, which left five people on the state's death row.

(Source: Death Penalty Information Center)

Recent Developments

In March 2009, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on SB 208 to repeal the death penalty in Kansas. The bill was amended and passed out of the Committee. The Senate Committee of the Whole re-referred the bill to the Senate Judiciary Committee for study by the Judicial Council during the Interim. The Judicial Council formed the Death Penalty Advisory Committee to study SB 208 and concluded the bill presented a number of technical problems which could not be resolved

by amending the bill. Instead, the Committee drafted a new bill which was introduced in the 2010 Legislative Session as SB 375. SB 375 was passed, as amended, out of the Senate Committee on Judiciary. However, the bill was killed on final action in the Senate Committee of the Whole.

Bills that would abolish the death penalty were introduced in both chambers in 2011. See 2011 HB 2323; 2011 SB 239. No action was taken on either bill. The 2012 House Committee on Corrections

and Juvenile Justice held an “informational” hearing on the death penalty.

In 2013, bills abolishing the death penalty were again introduced in both chambers. See 2013 HB 2397; 2013 SB 126. No action was taken on either bill during the 2013 or 2014 sessions.

Also in 2013, HB 2388 was introduced and heard in the House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice. This bill would have amended KSA 21-6619 to limit Kansas Supreme Court review in death penalty cases to properly preserved and asserted errors and allowing the Court to review unpreserved and unassigned errors only to correct manifest injustice (as defined in the bill). Proponents of the bill indicated it was introduced in response to the Kansas Supreme Court’s decision in *State v. Cheever*, 295 Kan. 229 (2012). A motion in the Committee to recommend the bill favorably as amended failed, and no further action was taken on the bill.

The 2013 Legislature passed Senate Sub. for HB 2043, which allows the Attorney General to file notice of intent to seek the death penalty in those cases where the county or district attorney or a court determines a conflict exists.

In 2014, the Senate Judiciary Committee introduced SB 257, which would have amended the procedure for direct appeals in death penalty cases by establishing statutory time limits and appellate brief page limits and limiting the scope of review. The bill also would have imposed additional requirements and limitations on both KSA 60-1507 motions generally as well as KSA 60-1507 motions specifically filed by prisoners under sentence of death. The Senate Judiciary Committee slightly modified the language of SB 257 and recommended a substitute bill for HB 2389 containing this language. Sen. Sub. for HB 2389 passed the Senate with these provisions, but they were removed by the conference committee and the bill was passed without any specific death penalty-related provisions.

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