

## Mandatory death sentence for cop killers? Officials say no

Experts claim mandatory sentencing guideline would be unconstitutional  
ABC4

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SALT LAKE CITY (ABC4 News) - In the wake of two recent police officer killings some social media posters have called on Utah lawmakers to implement a mandatory death penalty for the convicted murderers of law enforcement officers but experts say that's not a plausible option.

State Representative Paul Ray (R-Clearfield) is a former police officer himself proponent of the death penalty, not as a deterrent but as a solution.

"Any convict that's ever been put to death has never killed again after that," Rep. Ray told ABC4 News and that's the problem people forget once they go inside the prison they're not done killing. Now our correctional officers are at danger. Other inmates are in danger."

Representative Ray sponsored a 2017 bill that made targeting a law enforcement officer an aggravating factor that can lead to a death sentence but even he says that mandatory is going too far.

"I'm never in support of mandatory. I think that control needs to be with the courts," Rep. Ray said. "But there are very few cases in which I wouldn't support someone being put to death for killing a law enforcement officer."

Jason Stevenson, the Strategic Communications Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah told me that the highest court in the land has already spoken on this issue.

"The Supreme Court ruled back in the 70's that mandatory death penalty is unconstitutional because it takes away the discretion from the juries about whether or not to apply that ultimate penalty," Stevenson said. "Juries have a job to do. They weigh the evidence. They look at the character of the people involved. They look at the circumstances and they reach their decision."



Stevenson also points out that death penalty cases take decades and can be extremely costly to prosecute. Utah's last execution was in 2010 when Ronnie Lee Gardner was put to death by firing squad 26 years after his crime.

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