



**Name of policy: Capital Punishment**

**Date of Revised Policy Adoption:** *SLSC Annual General Meeting, June 7, 2019.*

**Historical Policy Adoption Date(s):** *SLSC Annual General Meeting, May 25, 2013.*

**Mission and Mandate:** St. Leonard's Society of Canada is a membership-based, charitable organization dedicated to community safety. The mission of SLSC is to promote a humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safe communities. It:

- a. Endorses evidence-based approaches to criminal and social justice;
- b. Conducts research and develops policy;
- c. Supports its member affiliates; and
- d. Advances collaborative relationships and communication among individuals and organizations dedicated to social justice.

**Purpose of SLSC Policies:** Policies of SLSC are developed in collaboration with affiliate agencies, SLSC's Board of Directors and members, and are ratified at the Annual General Meeting with the express purposes of:

- Identifying criminal justice and related issues relevant to its membership;
- Reflecting SLSC organizational values and social justice goals;
- Articulating SLSC approaches, practices and standards to achieve these goals; and
- Ensuring the good governance of SLSC on matters of legal, administrative and organizational relevance.

**Background:**

Capital punishment is the sentence of death received for a series of crimes designated as capital offences. The rationale for this sentence is supported by the belief that it acts as a deterrent and provides effective punishment. There is no correlation between the claimed deterring effects of capital punishment and homicide rates in Canada, or elsewhere. Capital punishment in Canada was abolished from the *Criminal Code* by Bill C-84, tabled by Warren Allmand, in 1976 by a vote of 131 to 124. As a result of C-84, capital punishment in the *Criminal Code* was replaced with a mandatory 25-year minimum prison sentence for first degree murder offences. During the period from 1859 to 1976, while capital punishment was legal, Canada executed 710 people convicted of a capital criminal offence. Further:

- Capital punishment leaves no room for a belief in habilitation;
- The possibility of wrongful convictions poses too great a risk to the credibility of the justice system;
- Although capital punishment has been abolished since 1976, there have been numerous examples of wrongfully convicted persons whose crimes could have resulted in the application of capital punishment;
- The use of capital punishment is overall, an ineffective method of dealing with persons convicted of murder offences;

- Crime statistics prior to the abolition of capital punishment in relation to current data demonstrate capital punishment does not serve as a deterrent to murder;<sup>1</sup> and,
- The irreversible consequences that would result from wrongful convictions pose too great a risk and serve to threaten the credibility of our justice system if an innocent life were mistakenly taken.

### **Issues/Scope**

- More than 160 United Nations (UN) members have either abolished capital punishment or do not use it at all.
- Capital punishment has implications for prisoners who are denied the opportunity to participate in the process of habilitation, while subsequently contributing to human and financial costs for those involved with its administration.
- Affiliates of SLSC annually successfully support many life sentenced people to integrate to their communities.

Capital punishment has been abolished since 1976. More recently, in an open vote in 2010 by Canada's House of Commons, the Government of Canada voted to stand consistently against the death penalty as a matter of principle, both in Canada and around the world.

### **Resolutions:**

Be it resolved that St. Leonard's Society of Canada opposes capital punishment.

### **Additional Information:**

#### **SLSC Reports/Publications:**

- St. Leonard's Society of Canada. (March 2013). *Brief on Capital Punishment*.
- St. Leonard's Society of Canada. (July 2013). *Capital Punishment Fact Sheet*.

#### **External Reports/Publications:**

- Death Penalty Information Centre. (no date). [\*Deterrence News and Development: 1996-2004\*](#).
- Amnesty International. (April 2019). [\*Death Penalty in 2018: Facts and Figures\*](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Death Penalty Information Centre. (no date). *Deterrence News and Development: 1996-2004*. Retrieved from <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/deterrence-news-and-development-1995-2004>