

# Tennessee Coalition to Abolish State Killing

*Promoting Alternatives to Capital Punishment in Tennessee*

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## A How to Guide

### **WHAT IS A WRITE-A-THON?**

A Write-A-Thon is a special event/fund-raiser that anyone can use. Participants commit themselves to writing letters to achieve several benefits such as collecting money for each letter written and involving the media in the operation.

Write-A-Thons are a great way to raise awareness about our organization and our group's activities. It is also a great way to raise money for your local chapter of the Tennessee Coalition to Abolish the State Killing. By using this event as a fundraiser you will seek pledges from sponsors (family, friends, teachers, neighbors, co-workers) on the number of letters that you write.

### **WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION DAY?**

International Death Penalty Abolition Day has its roots in a terrible lesson. In 1828, circumstantial evidence convicted Detroit native Patrick Fitzpatrick of rape and murder of an innkeeper's daughter. He was hanged shortly thereafter. Seven years later, Fitzpatrick's ex-roommate, wanting to clear his conscience on his deathbed, confessed to the woman's murder. Michigan's first official act of the legislature after becoming a state in 1847 was to repeal capital punishment. The day was March 1.

Tennessee has had its own dramatic death penalty abolition history. Prior to WW I, On March 26 in 1915, Tennessee state senator J. A. Clement, great-grandfather of Congressperson Bob Clement, stood in front of the Tennessee General Assembly and successfully lobbied for the repeal of Tennessee's capital punishment laws. That repeal lasted 4 years.

The Tennessee senator would not be the last Clement to leave a legacy in the efforts to end capital punishment. In 1965, fifty years after the Senator's appeal for compassion, his grandson, Tennessee Governor Frank Clement, made a similar plea to once again end Tennessee's use of capital punishment.

The bill to abolish the death penalty was passed in the Senate but narrowly defeated in the House by a 48 to 47 vote. Governor Clement immediately went to the state prison and told five death row inmates that he had commuted their deaths by electrocution to life. Three were scheduled to die that day. When one of the inmates, Rube Sims, learned of his fate, he said clapping his hands, "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Governor." The others wept and thanked the governor as well. "I can give you life," Clement told the men, "but I can't be the pardoning power ultimately."

## **PLANNING FOR THE WRITE-A-THON**

Here are the nuts and bolts:

- Form a group of people to coordinate the event; plan the time, place and content of your event.
- Recruit participants (1:1 talking - phone calls or face to face is your most effective mechanism – ALWAYS) to gather sponsors and write letters (see sponsor form)
- Customize your local flyer and distribute – do publicity (public service announcement for campus radio, place any free classified ads, do e-mail blasts, talk to friends, work colleagues, relatives...REALLY)
- The state office will contact the media: issue media advisory and supply you with press release for day of event (important to get location info to office ASAP)
- Supplies needed: Laptop (to look up addresses...surf DP sites...show walk-ins TCASK web site...), White Paper, Envelopes or Pens (black or blue), Stamps, Sample Letters, motivational quotes for walls, TCASK banner
- Optional supplies: prizes for raffles, food and refreshments (consider “corporate” sponsor to cover overhead)

The more elaborate you decide to make a Write-A-Thon, the earlier you should start! One of the most common problems encountered by groups is leaving sufficient time for adequate preparation.

## **GETTING PARTICIPANTS AND SPONSORS**

In recruiting those who will actually write the letters and solicit sponsors, there are two basic rules. First, the face-to-face approach is best. Second, the more the merrier! If one member of a TCASK group is able to draw in 10 sponsors at \$1 per letter, that member alone can write 10 letters and bring in \$100. However, if that member gets nine other people to participate in Write-A-Thon and each of participants gets sponsors at \$10 per letter, together they can write 1000 letters and raise \$1000; 24 others generates \$2500; you can ask for pledges of more than \$10 per person (\$1 per letter).

Not everyone will agree to attend and write, so they’d better sponsor you, right? Asking your friends, neighbors and co-workers for support for your commitment to write to your government officials is a positive dynamic. You might ask, “How much would a letter be worth if it helps change the system, get a moratorium and avoid killing people?” (see how-to guidelines)

## **PREPARING CONTENTS OF THE LETTERS**

Always have several copies of a “sample letter” to be used however, make sure that people know it is far more effective to individually hand write a letter rather than signing a pre-written typed letter.

## **GETTING SPONSORSHIPS FOR THE MARCH 1<sup>ST</sup> WRITE-A-THON**

### **What is International Death Penalty Abolition Day?**

March 1, International Death Penalty Abolition Day, has its roots in a terrible lesson. In 1828, circumstantial evidence convicted Detroit native Patrick Fitzpatrick of rape and murder of an innkeeper's daughter. He was hanged shortly thereafter. Seven years later, Fitzpatrick's ex-roommate, wanting to clear his conscience on his deathbed, confessed to the woman's murder. Michigan's first official act of the legislature after becoming a state in 1847 was to repeal capital punishment. The day was March 1.

### **What is a "write-a-thon"?**

A write-a-thon is a special event where participants commit themselves to writing 10 letters to elected officials and signing up sponsors for their letter writing much like you would for a 5 K walk.

Letter writers help make elected officials aware of the moratorium campaign goals and raise money for the local TCASK chapter so that it can carry out local grassroots organizing and education.

### **What is the moratorium campaign?**

The Coalition promotes the idea that the as Americans and Tennesseans we share a common set of constitutional values centered around the ideas of fairness and equal treatment before the law. Because the death penalty system in Tennessee and elsewhere in the United States is applied unfairly and unevenly TCASK believes that there needs to be an public conversation about the failings of the death penalty system to be administered in a way that corresponds with those shared constitutional values. The Moratorium campaign asks for a "time-out" on executions while we conduct a thorough study of the state's death penalty system.

### **What do you want me to do?**

Please support the event by sponsoring a letter writer or attending the event and writing letters yourself. You can pledge by the letter (e.g. pledge 2 dollars per letter = \$20 pledge) or you can donate a flat amount (e.g. donate \$25 for you to write all the letters).

## TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Two to three hours is an adequate time for an event like this
2. Choose a location that is easily accessible, well lit at night, has tables to write on, or is even glamorous. The library, town hall, a café, college student center, a coffeehouse, or any number of public places might work well.
3. Ask local companies to donate supplies, such as paper, pens and envelopes.
4. Seek out donations of all kind...movie passes, books, Ben & Jerry's, baked goods, coffee, hot chocolate, anything for a raffle!
5. Seek out donations for stamps in advance –go to local businesses. If not then buy stamps in advance.
6. Have a pre-Write-A-Thon table set in a public place, a busy shopping area, church, or school social spot to publicize your event and attract new members.
7. Publicize your event well - announcements over the PA systems, local radio stations, newspapers, flyer your campus or community, and website (send your event flyer to the [tcask@tcask.org](mailto:tcask@tcask.org) and we will post in on TCASK website!)
8. Decorate your tables - make the setting attractive for the media.
9. Decorate the walls with blow-ups of sample letters, letter-writing tips, and banners.
10. Have refreshment break(s); or have coffee/snacks available (for sale or free) throughout.
11. Have a break for a speaker, film, or video.
12. Have some music to write by.
13. Throughout the event have raffles (register sponsors and people who enter the location).
14. Have a “thermometer” to keep track of letters written and money raised.
15. Set up information table with TCASK information about specific activities that your group is involved in.

## Sample Phone Script

### Use for soliciting letter writers or sponsors

Hi, is this \_\_\_\_\_? This is \_\_\_\_\_ I'm calling  
(insert target name here) (insert caller's name here)  
on behalf of the \_\_\_\_\_ chapter of the Tennessee Coalition to  
(insert city name here)  
Abolish State Killing. Do you have just a minute for me to tell you about an upcoming event?

Great – thank you. March 1<sup>st</sup> is International Death Penalty Abolition Day. It commemorates marks the day in 1847 when the state of Michigan became the first English-speaking territory in the world to abolish capital punishment.

Every year TCASK organizes a statewide public education event and this year we're conducting a write-a-thon to promote our moratorium legislative campaign.

Do you know what a write-a-thon is?

#### **If no:**

A write-a-thon is a special event that where participants commit themselves to writing 10 letters to elected officials and signing up sponsors for their letter writing much like you would for a 5 K walk.

#### **If Yes (or after if no):**

So, our letter writers help make elected officials aware of the moratorium campaign goals and raise money for the local TCASK chapter so that it can carry out local grassroots organizing and education.

I'm calling to ask if you can be a letter writer who signs up sponsors or, if you're already committed that night, if you can sponsor one of our other letter writers? The write-a-thon is on Monday night March 1<sup>st</sup> at

\_\_\_\_\_  
(insert location of write-a-thon here)

\_\_\_\_\_, can you help us out with this year's event?

(insert target's name here)

## **SUGGESTED LIST OF LETTER RECIPIENTS:**

**Web sites indicate where addresses can be found**

- 1) GOVERNOR ([www.state.tn.us/governor/](http://www.state.tn.us/governor/))
- 2) LT. GOVERNOR ([www.legislature.state.tn.us](http://www.legislature.state.tn.us))
- 3) SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE ([www.legislature.state.tn.us](http://www.legislature.state.tn.us))
- 4) TENNESSEE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON  
([www.legislature.state.tn.us](http://www.legislature.state.tn.us))
- 5) YOUR DISTRICT HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE  
([www.legislature.state.tn.us](http://www.legislature.state.tn.us))
- 6) SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON  
([www.legislature.state.tn.us](http://www.legislature.state.tn.us))
- 7) YOUR DISTRICT SENATOR  
([www.legislature.state.tn.us](http://www.legislature.state.tn.us))
- 8) TENNESSEE COMPTROLLER GENERAL (Cost Oriented Letter)  
(<http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/>)
- 9) CITY/COUNTY COUNCIL CHAIR PRESIDENT  
[www.ctas.utk.edu/public/web/web.nsf/Search/CountySites?OpenDocument](http://www.ctas.utk.edu/public/web/web.nsf/Search/CountySites?OpenDocument)  
[www.mtas.utk.edu/gml-mtas.nsf/vwMCityTownsWebDataOnly?OpenView](http://www.mtas.utk.edu/gml-mtas.nsf/vwMCityTownsWebDataOnly?OpenView)
- 10) YOUR DISTRICT CITY/COUNTY COUNCIL PERSON  
[www.ctas.utk.edu/public/web/web.nsf/Search/CountySites?OpenDocument](http://www.ctas.utk.edu/public/web/web.nsf/Search/CountySites?OpenDocument)  
[www.mtas.utk.edu/gml-mtas.nsf/vwMCityTownsWebDataOnly?OpenView](http://www.mtas.utk.edu/gml-mtas.nsf/vwMCityTownsWebDataOnly?OpenView)
- 11) AT LARGE CITY/COUNTY COUNCIL MEMBERS  
[www.ctas.utk.edu/public/web/web.nsf/Search/CountySites?OpenDocument](http://www.ctas.utk.edu/public/web/web.nsf/Search/CountySites?OpenDocument)  
[www.mtas.utk.edu/gml-mtas.nsf/vwMCityTownsWebDataOnly?OpenView](http://www.mtas.utk.edu/gml-mtas.nsf/vwMCityTownsWebDataOnly?OpenView)

You can visit <http://capwiz.com/gbcs/dbq/officials/> and by entering your 9-digit zip code pull up all of your elected officials.

## TN SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_,

As your constituent I am writing to ask your support for legislation that would enact a temporary halt, a “time-out” on executions in Tennessee until an independent study of the inequality in our state’s death penalty system is completed and publicly discussed.

As you probably know 60 Minutes correspondent Ed Bradley highlighted the case of Paul Gregory House – an innocent man with multiple sclerosis who has been on Tennessee’s death row for nearly 20 years. Paul’s mother has been struggling with this injustice for years.

After some thought on this issue I am now concerned that only indigent defendants seem to receive death sentences and that so many of Tennessee’s death row inmates are diagnosed with mental illness.

Even if you support the death penalty, surely you do not support a system that exploits poor defendants, targets a vulnerable set of defendants who suffer diagnosed mental illnesses, or that sentences innocent people to death.

Former Tennessee Attorney General Mike Cody served on a blue ribbon panel that studied the issue and has proposed serious and necessary reforms. Kansas and New York overturned their death penalty systems last year. We already have alternatives sentences that hold violent offenders accountable.

I now know there’s been growing support for a moratorium in Tennessee. *My <church/city council/business/etc.> passed a resolution calling for a moratorium on executions. (...if applicable)* I ask you to please co-sponsor and/or support a moratorium and study bill.

Sincerely,

[Your signature, name, and address]

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A WRITE-A-THON?

- 1) **VOLUNTEER BASE:** A write-a-thon is an event that offers both new and veteran volunteers goal oriented tasks and concrete ways to become involved in local efforts. It's a great way to involve new people and build a team attitude.
- 2) **FUNDRAISING:** This activity can help your local chapter to earn some money. The more people you can get involved the more letters you can write and the more benefits you can achieve.
- 3) **EDUCATION:** Write-a-thon is also a way to educate yourselves and your group members about your goals, a moratorium, and how to become more active.
- 4) **MEDIA EXPUSURE:** Write-a-thon helps you to develop your chapter to recruit new members, to inform the public about your work and to make your elected officials interested in the mail sent to them.
- 5) **LOBBYING:** Helps you to engage in the process of educating and influencing your elected officials.
- 6) **SOCIALIZING:** It's important to get together and build a sense of community. It's a time to get know your allies as human beings and friends. It's a great way to do something constructive while simply hanging out.

# TENNESSEE COALITION TO ABOLISH STATE KILLING

*International Death Penalty Abolition Day*

Tuesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 6:00 P.M.  
@ *Portland Brew Coffee House*  
2605 12<sup>th</sup> AVENUE S

**WRITE-A-THON ...**  
**Legislative**  
**Moratorium Campaign**

***COME ONE, COME ALL—EVERYONE IS NEEDED!!***

Join TCASK, an affiliate supporter of Tennesseans for a Moratorium on Executions, for a fun day of communicating with our elected officials.

We need letter writers and sponsors to partake in coffee, information, media work, and letters galore.

Our goal is to write 250 letters and raise \$2500 to educate our elected officials and fund local activities.

**JOIN US – TUESDAY, MARCH 1ST**

For more information call: (615) 473-2950