

Freed inmates seek end to death penalty in Pa.

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PHILADELPHIA - Twenty people who have been exonerated after spending a combined 150 years on death row are calling Friday for a moratorium on capital punishment in Pennsylvania.

More than a dozen other states have enacted bans or halted executions amid concerns about wrongful convictions, racial inequities, botched executions and other issues.

Nationally, 123 people have been freed from death row after being exonerated, including at least six in Pennsylvania, advocacy groups say.

"I try to give people food for thought, that this is something that can take someone's life and liberty," said Ray Krone, 50, of Dover Township, who was cleared of murder through DNA after spending 10 years in prison, including three on Arizona's death row.

"I learned about it the hard way, during many years of contemplation in my jail cell," he said.

Supporters of a ban, including Innocence Project co-founder Barry Scheck, planned a Friday afternoon rally at the Liberty Bell organized by a group called Witness to Innocence.

The scheduled speakers include a former Texas prosecutor who now believes his office helped execute an innocent man and a once-condemned Philadelphia man, Harold Wilson, who was acquitted of a triple murder after a 2005 retrial.

"The death penalty is something that polarizes people right away," said Krone, who once supported capital punishment.

Then the postal worker was convicted not once, but twice, of killing a female bartender at a Phoenix lounge where he played darts. He was released in 2002, and later won a \$4.4 million settlement for the decade he lost in prison.

Krone now works for Witness to Innocence, campaigning and helping others who suffered his fate adjust to life after prison.

Sixty percent of the 225 people currently on death row in Pennsylvania are black, compared to 10.6 percent of the state's population, according to state and Census Department figures. Five are women.

In March 2003, a state Supreme Court committee on racial and gender bias called for a moratorium on executions until it could be assured the death penalty was being applied fairly. The group's 550-page report concluded that race appeared to play a major, "if not overwhelming" role in its use in some counties.

Gov. Ed Rendell, who opposed the recommendation, has signed 64 death warrants. His aides have said he supports the death penalty but wants to ensure it is applied fairly.

Only three inmates have been executed in the state since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976.