

Murder  
Victims'  
Families for  
**MVFR**  
Human  
Rights

**2009 Annual Report**

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## Introduction

Early in 2009 a Montana lawmaker, asked what sways legislators toward abolition, responded, **“Number one would be murder victim family members who have stepped forward in opposition to the death penalty.”** Stepping forward in opposition to the death penalty is what members of Murder Victims’ Families for Human Rights do day after day, and after five full years of operation, MVFHR has earned a solid place within the death penalty abolition landscape.

Support for the death penalty decreased in a variety of ways in 2009. The Death Penalty Information Center’s year-end report noted that the year saw the fewest death sentences since reinstatement in 1976, while 11 states considered abolition. And as MVFHR’s annual report shows, victims spoke out against the death penalty in many different ways throughout the year. Challenging the assumption that executions provide justice or closure for victims’ families continues to be essential to challenging the need for capital punishment.

As a victim-focused abolition and human rights organization, MVFHR brings together all types of survivors to declare that the death penalty has no place in a just society. This year’s annual report demonstrates that MVFHR continues to be an integral part of the movement against the death penalty and for victims.

## U.S. Program

### Policy Work

Because survivors of murder victims are commonly assumed to favor capital punishment, the voices of survivors who *oppose* the death penalty are in demand whenever the issue is under review or debate. MVFHR helps victims speak out against the death penalty and provides an organizational context and affiliation that strengthens each individual expression of opposition.

In 2009, MVFHR worked with state groups to provide victim testimony or supporting information at legislative hearings in Illinois, Montana, New Hampshire, Maryland, Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, and Alaska. Several members also provided oral or written testimony at hearings on the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s proposed new regulations on lethal injection procedures. Also this year, an MVFHR member was appointed to serve on a state death penalty study commission, the third time an MVFHR member has been appointed to such a commission since our founding.

As part of our “Prevention, Not Execution” project (see below), we provided materials and support to state groups working specifically for legislation that would exempt persons with severe mental illness from the death penalty. For example, copies of our report *Double Tragedies* were distributed to every lawmaker in North Carolina, where such a bill was under consideration. Also as part of our effort to oppose the death penalty for people with severe mental illness, we provided testimony at the request of the attorneys for D.C. “sniper” John Muhammad.

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**“If we truly value victims and want to do right by them, there are much more direct and genuine ways to achieve that goal than administering the death penalty to the perpetrator.” –**

*MVFHR testimony before the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, June 2009*

## Public Education

Voices of victims who oppose the death penalty help move the minds and hearts of people who are considering the issue, and ongoing public education is central to our organization’s work. During 2009, MVFHR members participated in press conferences and rallies and addressed hundreds of university and school groups, church groups, conferences, and gatherings throughout the U.S. and abroad (see “International Program,” below).

Through our newsletter, *Article 3*, we drew attention to specific aspects of the death penalty debate and helped heighten awareness of victims’ needs in the aftermath of murder. Newsletter issues in 2009 featured vivid testimony about how a child is affected by a parent’s murder, interviews with founders of the Texas After Violence Project and the originator of the term “parallel justice,” and thoughts from victims’ families on the ways in which the abolition movement sometimes gives insufficient attention to the anger that victims’ families feel.

Our “For Victims, Against the Death Penalty” blog, named one of the top 50 human rights blogs of the year, regularly presented our message of victim opposition to the death penalty through reports about our members’ work around the country, excerpts from their testimony, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, and speeches, and summaries of relevant research and commentary.

## “Prevention, Not Execution” Project

At the annual convention of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in early July, we released the report *Double Tragedies: Victims Speak Out on the Death Penalty for People with Severe Mental Illness*. This report represented a major focus of our work in the first half of 2009, and is based on interviews with families of victims killed by people with severe mental illness and families of people with severe mental illness who have been executed.

At the NAMI convention, the release of the report was accompanied by a presentation at which panelists – victims’ family members featured in the report – spoke to a crowd of mental health advocates and consumers. The panelists’ stories moved the audience to tears on many occasions and brought them to their feet by the end of the evening, ready to join the project and take action to end the death penalty for people with severe mental illness.

Since its release, we have been working with mental health and abolition organizations to distribute the report to lawmakers, mental health advocates,

members of law enforcement, attorneys, and others. *Double Tragedies* and the entire “Prevention, Not Execution” project open up a new front against the death penalty, bring a victim perspective to a national campaign focusing on opposing death sentences for people with mental disabilities, and have attracted new members and allies to MVFHR.

## Media Work

MVFHR continued to track coverage of victim opposition to the death penalty – quotations in news or feature articles, op-ed pieces, and letters to the editor -- and to include relevant excerpts in our newsletter and blog. In 2009, quotes from MVFHR members were featured in news coverage from Maine to California, and the New York bureau of The Mainichi Newspapers, Japan's oldest news organization, ran a series on the death penalty for which they interviewed MVFHR members. In Japan itself, a meeting of the board of directors of Ocean, MVFHR's Japanese affiliate, was filmed by the Japanese public broadcasting station, and public presentations at universities and other venues during MVFHR's June trip to Asia received very positive media coverage

We continued to draw attention to how executions harm families of the executed through stories in *In the Fray* magazine (“The Forgotten Victims,” February 2) and Florida's *Palm Beach Post* (“Children live with the heartbreak of parents on death row,” May 22), and our mental illness work received attention from Reuters, the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Portland Press-Herald*, and several mental health publications. A new documentary film called *A Broken System* featured two MVFHR members, and the publication of *Boston Globe* journalist Brian MacQuarrie's book *The Ride: A Shocking Murder and a Bereaved Father's Journey from Rage to Redemption* meant substantial coverage of victim opposition to the death penalty.

## Changing Minds About the Death Penalty

When evaluating the effectiveness of our public presentations, we take particular note of those occasions when we learn that the MVFHR message helped a listener reconsider previously held support for the death penalty. In 2009 we received valuable confirmation of the power of MVFHR's message to move people toward a re-evaluation of their beliefs on the issue.

Several members of the audiences at our presentations in Japan and China (see “International Program,” below) told us that they changed their minds about the death penalty (no longer supporting it) as a result of the presentation. We heard similar reports from attendees at the “Prevention, Not Execution” panel that we delivered at the annual convention of the National Alliance on Mental Illness in San Francisco. Listeners who had never before heard victims speak out against the death penalty told us that we had created a space in which it was possible to evaluate the issue of the death penalty in a new way. “I now must admit that I was wrong for supporting the death penalty,” wrote one. “Execution is not the only way to protect the public; in fact it creates ever more harm to a very bad situation.”

Our fall newsletter focused on this topic, featuring an interview with and other accounts from victims' family members who had initially been strong supporters of the death penalty.

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**“While victims absolutely deserve a good and respectful experience within the criminal justice system, I think we need to go beyond that to ask, ‘What do victims need, how can we as a society acknowledge that what happened to them was wrong, and how can we help them?’”**

– From the feature on “parallel justice” in the MVFHR newsletter, fall 2009

## International Program

MVFHR gave presentations in Japan in June and November to students at several universities, to the Federation of Bar Associations, and to police officers and youth correctional officers, met with members of Ocean (MVFHR's Japanese affiliate) and with new victims' family members, and worked with local and national organizers to plan an MVFHR speaking tour in Japan in 2010. Building on the effectiveness of our 2007 visit to China, MVFHR returned in late 2009 to address a broader range of audiences through public events at a bookstore and a business district café, as well as to students at the country's largest university.

Again this year, MVFHR members participated in Cities for Life - Cities Against the Death Penalty events in Italy and Belgium, and we were represented at a series of speaking events in the United Kingdom that reached a total of 4,500 listeners. MVFHR also represented the United States at a seminar titled "Towards a universal moratorium on the death penalty: The case of Arab Countries," held in Madrid in July. The seminar was a joint project of the Human Rights Office of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Casa Arabe, a Spanish institution that promotes analysis and research on Arab and Islamic countries. Finally, our work was featured in the March issue of the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) newsletter, and we participated in the General Assembly meeting of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, held in Rome in June.

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**“Little has been done to study the effect of an execution on an inmate's children, but some say the combination of the loss of the parent, shame about the crime for which he or she is convicted, and conflicted feelings about the government often come together to inflict deep emotional and psychological trauma that follows them into adulthood.”**

*– from a Palm Beach Post article about MVFHR's “No Silence, No Shame” project, May 2009*

## Organizational Development

We noted last year that in 2008 MVFHR received its first long-term general operating support in the form of a three-year grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies. In the fall of 2008 we also responded to a call for proposals from the European Institute on Democracy and Human Rights, and in March 2009 we were notified that we chosen as a laureate and will the beneficiary of support for our work in amplifying victims' voices against the death penalty within both the U.S. and the international abolition movements.

Additionally, renewed support from the Solomon Fund helped us to continue our work, particularly with respect to drawing attention to families of the executed, and support from the Swedish Fund of Amnesty International will help with the public presentations that several of our members will make in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea in 2010. As well, despite the economic downturn we continued to build a base of individual donors through regular fundraising solicitations.

In 2009 we added two part-time staff members: Kate Lowenstein, experienced anti-death penalty and victims' rights advocate, and Catherine Brady, bookkeeper. We were able to bring our geographically scattered board of directors together for in-person meetings in Boston in January and November, and to undertake the design of a new website and database management system that will launch in early 2010.

## Looking Ahead

With the launch of the new website, participation in the 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress Against the Death Penalty in Geneva, Switzerland, plans to reach new audiences through a victims' speaking tour in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, providing victims' voices to efforts to exempt people with severe mental illness from the death penalty, and plans to gather victim abolitionists from several states together for a training summit, we are looking ahead to much important work in 2010 and beyond. We look forward to continuing to amplify the voices of victims and to educating listeners, readers, and voters about victim opposition to the death penalty. Throughout our work, we will continue to put into action our belief that executions do not achieve justice for victims and that the death penalty is a violation of basic human rights.

We remain extremely grateful to all who support the work of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights.

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**Today is a day to hold the victims of murder in our hearts and minds not as statistics but as distinct individuals, each unlike any other. It is a day to acknowledge each homicide as a singular, incomparable tragedy and to recognize that each homicide is a theft of a unique, irreplaceable, deeply loved human life, representing a world of devastation for the victim's surviving family and friends.** – *from MVFHR's Statement on National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims, 2009*

**The most basic of human rights, the right to life, is violated both by homicide and by execution. We call today for a consistent human rights ethic in response to violence: let us not respond to one human rights violation with another human rights violation. Let us recognize that justice for victims is not achieved by taking another life.** – *from MVFHR's Statement on World Day Against the Death Penalty, 2009*

## 2009 Board of Directors and Staff

**Bill Babbitt**, member of the Board of Directors, has spoken publicly about the way the death penalty affects families of the executed since his brother was executed by the state of California in 1999. His story is told in the book *Capital Consequences* and in the documentaries *And Then One Night* and *A Question of Justice*. Babbitt has spoken at a press conference at the United Nations, testified before legislative committees in Massachusetts and New Jersey, and addressed many college audiences about mental illness and the death penalty.

**Jeanne Bishop**, Treasurer of the Board of Directors, is the sister of Nancy Bishop Langert, who was shot to death along with her husband and their unborn child in 1990. Bishop has testified before Illinois the Governor's Commission on Capital Punishment, the Illinois Prisoner Review Board, and several state legislative committees. She appears in the death penalty documentaries *The Innocent* and *Too Flawed To Fix*. Along with her sister Jennifer, she received the Brigid Award from Concern Worldwide, honoring women who exemplify justice, generosity, and compassion in their work and daily lives. Bishop serves as assistant public defender in the Office of the Cook County Public Defender and is an adjunct professor at Northwestern University School of Law in the trial advocacy program. She is the author of several law review articles and op-ed pieces, serves on the Advisory Board of the Northwestern Center on Wrongful Convictions, and volunteers for the gun violence prevention organizations Million Mom March and the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence.

**Catherine Brady**, Bookkeeper, has been crunching numbers since it was done with pencil and ledger paper. She took an eight-year break from numbers to engage in grassroots organizing and fundraising in the 1980s and early 90s with INFACT, leader of the Nestle and GE boycotts. Catherine has held positions ranging from part-time bookkeeper to Director of Finance and Administration with several progressive non-profits in the Boston area.

**Priscilla Caputo**, Administrative Staff, has worked for several years with families and victims of oppression and violence developing and directing a variety of clinical and community programs to provide support and equal access to crucial services within the medical, legal, and social service systems. She is a counselor, educator, and committed human rights advocate.

**Renny Cushing**, Executive Director, whose father was murdered in 1988, is a lifelong social justice activist and a pioneer in the effort to bridge the death penalty abolition movement and the victims' rights movement. He has testified before the U.S. Congress and several state legislatures and addressed hundreds of audiences in other venues in the U.S. and abroad regarding victim opposition to the death penalty. He is the co-author of *Dignity Denied: The Experience of Murder Victims' Family Members Who Oppose the Death Penalty* and *I Don't Want Another Kid to Die: Families of Victims Murdered by Juveniles Oppose the Juvenile Death Penalty*. He serves on the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and the steering committee of the World Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. He is a member of the New Hampshire State House of Representatives and of the Criminal Justice Committee of the National Conference of State Legislators.

**Reverend Walter Everett**, member of the Board of Directors, serves on the board of Pennsylvanians United Against the Death Penalty and speaks several times a month to audiences around the states. He has testified before the Joint Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly and spoken at numerous events surrounding the state's efforts to carry out its first execution in 45 years. Everett's son was shot and killed in 1987, and after a long struggle Everett was able to reconcile with the man convicted of the murder, to the extent that the two now speak together at prisons, universities, and churches. Reverend Everett has been active in several restorative justice organizations, including the Restorative Justice Task Force of the Christian Conference of Connecticut (for which he has served as Chair) and the Hartford-based Board of Community Partners in Action.

**Toshi Kazama**, member of the Board of Directors, is a photographer who spent eight years gathering the images for "Youth of Death Row: A Photodocumentary Exploration." The documentary includes photos of 20 American youths on death rows across the country – photos that Kazama was able to take after being granted unprecedented access to the prisoners and the facilities – and portraits of the prisoner's family members, the victim's family members, the prison, the prison cemetery, the state's execution chamber, and the crime scene. Kazama has shown the documentary at universities, conferences, and other public forums in the United States, Japan, and Taiwan, and received considerable press coverage for the presentation and the discussions that follow.

**Kate Lowenstein**, Program Staff, is an attorney and social worker with five years of experience organizing and advocating for victims who oppose the death penalty. In 2004, Kate co-wrote *amicus curiae* briefs on behalf of victims' family members in two high-profile cases that were before the U.S. Supreme Court: *Schriro v. Summerlin* and *Roper v. Simmons*. In her work with MVFHR, Kate contributes expert knowledge about victims' rights issues and death penalty abolition work and keen sensitivity to the issues involved in working with victims and helping them to assert their rights and become effective spokespeople against the death penalty.

**Robert Meeropol**, Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors, is the younger son of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were executed by the United States government in 1953 for "conspiring to steal the secret of the atom bomb." In 1990 he founded the Rosenberg Fund for Children, which provides support to children of parents who have been harassed or jailed for their progressive beliefs. Meeropol is the author of the book *An Execution in the Family*, and he speaks widely against the death penalty, tracing the connection between the fight against Communism in the 1950s and the attacks on civil liberties and human rights in the current, post-9/11 era.

**Bill Pelke**, member of the Board of Directors, is the president and co-founder of "The Journey of Hope ... from Violence to Healing," an organization that hosts annual speaking tours led by murder victims' family members who oppose the death penalty. He is also the chair of the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and a board member of Alaskans Against the Death Penalty, and he has spoken against the death penalty in numerous forums across the United States and in 10 other countries. Initially a supporter of the death penalty, Pelke eventually became involved in an international effort to spare the life of the 15-year-old girl who was sentenced to death for the murder of Pelke's grandmother. He continued to speak out against the juvenile death penalty up until the Supreme Court's recent ruling in the *Simmons* case. He has been interviewed for numerous radio, television, and magazine stories.

**Vicki Schieber**, Chair of the Board of Directors, has been outspoken in her opposition to the death penalty since her daughter was raped and murdered in 1998. Vicki and her husband Sylvester

actively opposed the death penalty for their daughter's murderer and subsequently testified in support of a moratorium and death penalty study commission bill in Maryland and for an abolition bill in Pennsylvania. They have published op-ed pieces about the death penalty in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Washington Post*, and their story is included in an NBC film on the death penalty sponsored by the Robert Kennedy Foundation. Vicki has long been active in leadership positions in non-profits dedicated to literacy and programs for elderly, disabled, and low-income residents of Washington, DC. She holds a Masters in Business Administration and served for many years as Executive Director of the Council on Employee Benefits in Bethesda, Maryland.

**Susannah Sheffer**, Staff Writer and Project Director, has developed numerous written materials about victim opposition to the death penalty, including *Double Tragedies: Victims Speak Out Against the Death Penalty for People with Severe Mental Illness* and *Creating More Victims: How Executions Hurt the Families Left Behind*. She is the author of four books, and in her work with MVFHR she draws upon two decades of experience interviewing, writing, and editing.

**Marie Verzulli**, member of the Board of Directors, whose sister Cathy was murdered, works as the victim/survivor advocate for New Yorkers for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, focusing on filling the gaps in services and empowering victims to advocate for programs that address the root causes of crime and violence. Marie is Vice-President of the Capital District Coalition for Crime Victims Rights and serves on the Restorative Justice Commission of the Albany Roman Catholic Diocese, the Center for Community Justice Board and the advisory committee of the downstate parole reform and prison re-entry project. Marie is the founder and director of Family and Friends of Homicide Victims.

**Bud Welch**, President of the Board of Directors, became an ardent spokesperson against the death penalty after his daughter, along with 167 others, was killed in the bomb blast that destroyed the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Welch has testified before 22 state legislative bodies, the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, the Russian Duma, and the British and European Parliaments, and addressed groups at universities, law schools, and religious organizations across the U.S. and Europe. He serves on the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and was a member of the board of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation. For his work as an anti-death penalty activist, he has received several "abolitionist of the year" awards and other honors and been interviewed for numerous print and broadcast news stories.

## Financial Report

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights (MVFHR) was founded in 2004 and was incorporated in the state of New Hampshire as a non-profit organization in 2005. MVFHR has received a determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service that it is a tax-exempt non-profit organization within the meaning of Section 501(c)3 of the Federal Tax Code. Donations to MVFHR may be claimed as a deduction for charitable contribution purposes on federal tax returns. A copy of our Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Financial Statements are available at [guidestar.org](http://guidestar.org), and our IRS Form 990 will be available there by Jul.

MVFHR maintains an account at Bank of America. Deposits are made at branches in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. A finance committee, composed of members of the board and staff, reviews the organization's finances via teleconference call meetings.

The unaudited statements that appear on the following pages show the organization's financial position as of December 31, 2009. Although the organization ended the year with a deficit, the prior two years had significantly larger surpluses than this year's deficit, so cash flow has been adequate. The 2009 balance sheet shows funds received but unspent in 2009 from the European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights, which will fund our activities for the first three quarters of 2010. The second installment of the EIDHR grant is expected to be received during the third quarter of 2010.

These preliminary financial statements will be reviewed by our CPA, and likely adjusted. Final statements will be issued mid-year.

MVFHR is grateful for the support of the following foundations and groups in 2009: European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights, The Atlantic Philanthropies, Solomon Fund, Swedish Amnesty Fund.

Submitted by

Jeanne Bishop  
Treasurer

Catherine Brady  
Bookkeeper

## Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights

### *Profit & Loss*

January - December 2009

<b>Income</b>	
Contributions Income	41,540.37
Expense Reimbursements	150.00
Grants	189,412.35
Interest, credits, rebates	752.50
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 231,855.22</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Advertising	351.00
Bank Charges	785.19
Board Expenses	7,634.76
Books, Subscriptions, Reference	119.88
Computer Maintenance and Repair	596.45
Conferences & Meetings	1,148.50
Contract Services	686.63
Dues and Subscriptions	591.44
Fees and Registration	777.25
Hospitality	50.00
Insurance	490.00
Miscellaneous	-1,074.41
Occupancy	1,500.00
Office Equipment	1,609.39
Personnel	151,918.14
Postage and Delivery	5,013.86
Printing and Copying	17,997.97
Professional Fees	6,294.75
Program Expense	775.31
Supplies	1,420.26
Telecommunications	9,836.39
Travel	27,140.21
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 235,662.97</b>
<b>Net Operating Income</b>	<b>(\$3,807.75)</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>	
Capital Purchases	3,311.95
<b>Surplus/deficit</b>	<b>(\$7,119.70)</b>

## Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights

### Balance Sheet

As of December 31, 2009

	Total
<b>ASSETS</b>	
<b>Current Assets</b>	
<b>Bank Accounts</b>	
Checking BOA	18,832.17
Savings Account BOA	123,188.21
<b>Total Bank Accounts</b>	<b>\$ 142,020.38</b>
<b>Accounts Receivable</b>	
Accounts Receivable	0.00
<b>Total Accounts Receivable</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$ 142,020.38</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 142,020.38</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	
<b>Liabilities</b>	
<b>Current Liabilities</b>	
<b>Accounts Payable</b>	
Accounts Payable	1,099.36
<b>Total Accounts Payable</b>	<b>\$ 1,099.36</b>
<b>Credit Cards</b>	
Bank of America Visa card	1,031.74
MVFHR AMEX	-1,764.03
<b>Total Credit Cards</b>	<b>-\$ 732.29</b>
<b>Other Current Liabilities</b>	
Payroll Liabilities	7,415.54
Unearned or Deferred Revenue *	109,059.69
<b>Total Other Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$ 116,475.23</b>
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$ 116,842.30</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$ 116,842.30</b>
<b>Equity</b>	
Opening Bal Equity	0.00
Retained Earnings	32,297.78
Net Income	-7,119.70
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>\$ 25,178.08</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	<b>\$ 142,020.38</b>
* Portion of EIDHR grant received but unspent in 2009	