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Mar 5, 8:59 PM EST

## Fla. death row inmates often die in prison before execution

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) -- Florida's condemned inmates are almost as likely to die in prison as they are to be executed, according to a newspaper's review of state prison records.

Thirty-four inmates have been executed since 1993 and 29 have died in prison, mostly from natural causes, according to the St. Petersburg Times' review of Department of Corrections statistics. Prison officials were unable to provide detailed statistics before 1993.

If the current average of two executions a year continues, it will take about 187 years to execute the 374 men and women currently on death row in Florida, the newspaper reported Monday.

By comparison, Texas averaged two executions a month in 2006 and has executed six inmates so far this year, according to the nonprofit Death Penalty Information Center.

Some legal experts said the glut of Florida prisoners awaiting execution points to flaws in the state's system that go far beyond the lethal injection process that just underwent scrutiny after a botched execution last year.

"A common sense guy would say this just doesn't work, and we are sure wasting a lot of money and a lot of time," said Charles Rose, a professor at the Stetson University College of Law.

Florida is the only one of the nation's 38 death penalty states that doesn't require a jury to unanimously agree on a death sentence. Judges make the final sentencing determination, but are required to give great weight to a jury's wishes.

As the death row population has grown, so have the mandatory legal appeals to spare their lives. The appeals process is expensive and slow.

Death penalty advocates support shortening the appeals process.

"If we're going to have capital punishment it needs to be reasonably expeditious," said state Sen. Victor Crist, an ardent defender of Florida's death penalty laws.

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Jeff Nelson has waited 26 years for the execution of the man who killed his 10-year-old sister, Elisa. He said convicted killer Larry Mann's appeals have focused on "arguments over the T's and the I's and not over guilt and innocence."

He sees little hope of any major changes in the state's execution procedures.

"What are you going to fix? You've got to give everybody their due process," he said.

"You're never going to move on," he said. "For the rest of my life I'm going to be faced with birthdays and anniversaries and family reunions and all kinds of stuff. It's never gone."

Opponents said the death penalty drains valuable resources.

"It's more trouble than it's worth," said Mark Elliott, director of Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. "All this over killing two usually old men every year."

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