POST-ATKINS PROBLEMS WITH ENFORCING THE SUPREME COURT’S BAN ON EXECUTING THE MENTALLY RETARDED

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past century, public acceptance and understanding of mental retardation has grown.¹ Society presently accepts people with disabilities and emphasizes community-based programs that provide the disabled with education and support services.² In the past, however, stereotyping, discrimination, and mistreatment of the mentally retarded was so horrific that the United States Supreme Court described it as “grotesque.”³ The public believed that mental retardation was the “principle source of criminal and immoral behavior in society.”⁴ Consequently, to protect society, the government forced the institutionalization and sterilization of many people with mental retardation.⁵

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⁴ Cohen, supra note 1, at 459. The “Jukes Study,” conducted by Robert Dugdale, linked degenerate behavior by members of the Jukes family to an inherited mental deficiency. History of Disability Services, supra note 2. This study, in connection with increasing public awareness of genetics, contributed to the popular view linking “idiocy, pauperism, insanity, and crime” to genetics. Id.
⁵ Cohen, supra note 1, at 459-60. Protection of society included the idea of protecting the gene pool. History of Disability Services, supra note 2. Consequently, by 1926 there were mandatory sterilization laws in twenty-three states, and between 1925 and 1955 the government forced over 50,000 mentally retarded individuals to undergo sterilization. Id. In an infamous 1926 decision, the Supreme Court upheld the forced sterilization of a retarded woman stating:
[i]t is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory

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In the 1950s, society began to realize that there was no link between mental retardation and criminality and attitudes towards mental retardation started to change. During the next two decades, a government panel on mental retardation focused the public’s attention on the mentally retarded and their unique needs. Parent organizations also demanded that their children be educated in the same schools as non-disabled children. Finally, in 1977, the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania ruled that, once institutionalized by the state, the mentally retarded have “a constitutional right to be provided with minimally adequate habilitation under the least restrictive conditions consistent with the purpose of the commitment.” Following this landmark decision, a large deinstitutionalization movement across the country led to the development of home and community-based services with a focus on self-determination and individualized support in the least restrictive environment.

Simultaneously, the use of the death penalty evolved to limit the sentence of capital punishment to those murders society views as particularly heinous. A dramatic reduction occurred in the number and types of crimes punishable by death. From colonial times until the nineteenth century, most states automatically imposed the death penalty for all homicides and for many felonies. During the

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vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes.
Three generations of imbeciles are enough.

6 Cohen, supra note 1, at 460.
7 Id.
8 History of Disability Services, supra note 2.
9 Halderman v. Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp., 446 F. Supp. 1295, 1319 (E.D. Pa. 1977). The court in Halderman found that the United States Constitution required that state institutions provide “such minimally adequate habilitation as will afford a reasonable opportunity for them to acquire and maintain such life skills as are necessary to enable them to cope as effectively as their capacities permit.” Id. at 1325. The court noted that “involuntarily committed retarded children have a constitutional right ‘to a program of treatment that affords the individual a reasonable chance to acquire and maintain those life skills that enable him to cope as effectively as his own capacities permit with the demands of his own person and of his environment and to raise the level of his physical, mental and social efficiency.'” Id. at 1317 (citing Woe v. Mathews, 408 F. Supp. 419, 429 (E.D.N.Y. 1976)). The court ordered immediate steps be taken to move the residents from Pennhurst to community facilities that could provide minimally adequate habilitation. Id. at 1325.
10 History of Disability Services, supra note 2.
11 Mark Costanzo & Lawrence T. White, Overview of Death Penalty and Capital Trials, 50 J. OF SOC. ISSUES 1, 4-5 (1994).
13 Id.
nineteenth century, states gradually began restricting the death penalty to first-degree murders, and eventually began allowing the judge or jury to decide when to impose a death sentence.\textsuperscript{14}

For a brief period of time during the 1970s, the Supreme Court held that the then existing death penalty schemes were unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{15} The Supreme Court ultimately affirmed the death penalty,\textsuperscript{16} but has repeatedly increased the constitutional limitations on imposing it. The Supreme Court, for example, indicated that it would find unconstitutional death sentences for crimes other than murder.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, the Court also banned the execution of the mentally ill\textsuperscript{18} and the execution of those under the age of sixteen at the time the crime was committed.\textsuperscript{19}

In \textit{Atkins v. Virginia},\textsuperscript{20} the trend toward public understanding and acceptance of the mentally retarded and the movement to limit the

\textsuperscript{14} Id. at 510. First-degree murder is defined as “murder that is willful, deliberate, or premeditated, or that is committed during the course of another serious felony,” \textit{BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY} 1038 (7th ed. 1999).

\textsuperscript{15} In 1972, in \textit{Furman v. Georgia}, the Supreme Court placed a moratorium on the death penalty, finding that then existing state systems for imposing the death penalty were arbitrary and capricious. 408 U.S. 238, 239 (1972). Following \textit{Furman}, most states enacted new laws to ensure fair and rational imposition of death sentences. See \textit{Kaplan}, supra note 12, at 512-15. These new state laws followed a scheme of “guided discretion” during the penalty phase that required the trier of fact to weigh certain aggravating factors against any mitigating factors. \textit{Id}.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Gregg v. Georgia}, 428 U.S. 153, 195 (1976). In \textit{Gregg}, the Supreme Court examined the new “guided discretion” schemes and concluded that these statutes solved the problems identified in \textit{Furman}. \textit{Id}. The death penalty was restored, and in 1976 Gary Gilmore became the first person to be executed under the new death penalty statutes. \textit{Mikal Gilmore, Shot in the Heart} xi (1993)

\textsuperscript{17} See, e.g., \textit{Enmund v. Florida}, 458 U.S. 782, 789 (1982) (holding that the death penalty is excessive punishment for an offender who had not taken, attempted to take, or intended to take a life); \textit{Coker v. Georgia}, 433 U.S. 584, 593-96 (1977) (holding that the imposition of the death penalty for the crime of rape is unconstitutional).

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ford v. Wainwright}, 477 U.S. 399, 410 (1986) (holding that the Eighth Amendment prohibits the execution of the mentally ill).

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Thompson v. Oklahoma}, 487 U.S. 815 (1988). In \textit{Thompson}, a plurality consisting of Justices Steven, Brennan, Marshall, and Blackmun found that the Eighth Amendment prohibited the execution of individuals who were under the age of sixteen at the time the crime was committed. \textit{Id}. at 838. Justice O'Connor concurred in the decision. \textit{Id}. at 848 (O'Connor, J., concurring). Justice O'Connor felt that although it was likely that there was a national consensus forbidding the execution of offenders whose crimes were committed before the age of sixteen, the evidence before the Court was not sufficient to establish such a consensus. \textit{Id}. at 855 (O'Connor, J., concurring). Instead, Justice O'Connor felt that the present statute was unconstitutional because the failure of the legislation to adopt a minimum age did not show the special care and deliberation required under the Eighth Amendment. \textit{Id}. at 858-59 (O'Connor, J., concurring).

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Atkins v. Virginia}, 536 U.S. 304 (2002).
use of the death penalty converged. On September 25, 2001, the
Supreme Court granted *certiorari* to reconsider whether the execution
of the mentally retarded violated the Eighth Amendment.\(^{21}\) Applying
the “evolving standards of decency test,”\(^{22}\) the Court considered the
significant number of states that have banned the execution of
mentally retarded offenders, the views of professional and religious
organizations, and opinion poll results before concluding that the
execution of the mentally retarded constitutes “cruel and unusual
punishment.”\(^{23}\) The Court, however, chose not to adopt a uniform
definition of mental retardation.\(^{24}\) Instead, the Court left the task of
defining mental retardation to the states.\(^{25}\)

Currently, numerous statutory and organizational definitions for
mental retardation exist.\(^{26}\) Although most definitions have similar
features, variability among statutory definitions is so great that it can
result in one state classifying a defendant as mentally retarded while
others do not.\(^{27}\) Further, while the use of valid and reliable
psychological testing measures is a central feature of the professional
organizational definitions of mental retardation, few statutory
definitions mandate the use of these readily available testing
methods.\(^{28}\) To avoid variability among the states and to ensure the
proper identification of mentally retarded defendants, states should
adopt both a uniform definition of mental retardation and uniform
methods for assessment. Accordingly, state legislatures should adopt
the American Association of Mental Retardation’s (the “AAMR”)
current definition for mental retardation and require that all
assessments include the use of both a full-scale standardized
intelligence test and a measurement designed to evaluate adaptive
functioning.

This Comment analyzes the Supreme Court’s ban on the
execution of mentally retarded defendants, as well as the problems
created by the Court’s failure to adopt a uniform standard for
determining mental retardation. Part I.A of this Comment reviews

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\(^{21}\) Atkins v. Virginia, 534 U.S. 809 (2001). In 1989, the Supreme Court had
previously considered this issue in *Penry v. Lynaugh*, 492 U.S. 302 (1989). In *Penry*,
the Court found that there was no national consensus against executing the mentally
retarded and thus held that the practice did not violate the Constitution. *Id.* at 334.

\(^{22}\) See infra text accompanying notes 37-41.

\(^{23}\) *Atkins*, 536 U.S. at 318-21.

\(^{24}\) *Id.* at 317.

\(^{25}\) *Id.*

\(^{26}\) See infra Part II.

\(^{27}\) See infra Part II.A.

\(^{28}\) *Id.*
the Supreme Court’s opinion in *Penry v. Lynaugh*, which found no constitutional barriers to the execution of the mentally retarded. Part I.B discusses the recent Supreme Court decision in *Atkins v. Virginia*, which found that it is now “cruel and unusual punishment” to execute a mentally retarded defendant. Part II surveys the various statutorily and professionally defined definitions of mental retardation. Part III discusses the various methods for assessing mental retardation. Specifically, Part III.A will look at various intelligence tests, and Part III.B will examine the testing of adaptive functioning. Part IV analyzes the problems and uncertainty created by the lack of a uniform standard and guidelines for assessment of mental retardation. Finally, Part V concludes that the states should adopt a uniform definition of mental retardation and place guidelines on the method of assessment to avoid the erroneous execution of mentally retarded criminal defendants. Specifically, this part proposes that state legislators adopt the current AAMR definition for mental retardation and impose a statutory requirement that all evaluations utilize both a full-scale, standardized intelligence test and a diagnostic test designed to measure adaptive behaviors.

I. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT OF THE MENTALLY RETARDED AND THE EIGHTH AMENDMENT

The Eighth Amendment prohibits the use of “cruel and unusual punishments.” The Supreme Court has clearly established that this amendment prohibits the use of punishments considered cruel and unusual at the time the Bill of Rights was drafted. Based on these criteria, the Supreme Court has held that the death penalty does not
constitute a per se violation of the Eighth Amendment. In Gregg, the Court noted, “the imposition of the death penalty for the crime of murder has a long history of acceptance both in the United States and in England.”

The constraints of the Eighth Amendment are not limited, however, solely to those practices abhorred at common law. In Trop v. Dulles, Chief Justice Warren wrote that “the Amendment must draw its meaning from the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society.” Under this evolving standards of decency test, a practice is unconstitutional if it violates society’s current prevailing standards of decency. This test has been refined to require that the court make an assessment of contemporary values based upon objective indicia that reflect the public opinion. Defendants have successfully used this test to challenge the imposition of the death penalty for crimes other than murder, and when the defendants are mentally ill or are younger than sixteen at the time the crime was committed.

Attorneys have also used the evolving standards of decency test to challenge the imposition of a death sentence on mentally retarded offenders. In 1989, attorneys for John Paul Penry unsuccessfully argued that the execution of the mentally retarded violated then existing standards of decency. Eleven years later the Supreme Court granted certiorari in Atkins v. Virginia to revisit this same issue. Recognizing a shift in public opinion as evidenced by the enactment of many laws prohibiting a capital sentence for a mentally retarded defendant, the Supreme Court found that contemporary values had evolved to the point where the execution of the mentally retarded would violate the Eighth Amendment.

37 Id. at 176.
38 Ford, 477 U.S. at 406.
40 Id. at 101.
41 Id.
42 See, e.g., Gregg, 428 U.S. at 173.
44 See, e.g., Ford, 477 U.S. at 399.
49 Atkins, 536 U.S. at 321.
A. Penry v. Lynaugh

John Paul Penry was twenty-two years old with mild-to-moderate retardation when he killed Pamela Carpenter. On October 25, 1979, Penry entered Carpenter’s home intending to rape her. A struggle ensued, and the victim superficially wounded Penry with a pair of scissors. Enraged, Penry raped, beat, and stabbed the victim with the scissors. Although mortally wounded, Pamela Carpenter survived long enough to describe her assailant to the local sheriff’s deputies. Based upon the victim’s description, the police suspected Penry, a recent parolee who had served time for rape. During questioning, Penry confessed twice, and the police subsequently charged him with capital murder.

Penry’s retardation originated from organic brain damage that occurred during and after his breech birth. Severe abuse by his mother, including repeated vicious blows to his head, exacerbated his brain damage. He quit school during the first grade and did not learn to print his name until he was thirteen. During childhood, IQ tests placed Penry’s IQ somewhere between fifty and sixty, which corresponds to mild-to-moderate retardation.

Before trial, Penry notified the court of his intention to raise an insanity defense and filed a motion requesting a competency hearing. At the competency hearing, the defense called Dr. Jerome Brown, a clinical psychologist, to testify as to Penry’s mental retardation. He testified that his evaluation revealed Penry to have

51 Id. at 2.
52 Id.
53 Id.
54 Penry, 492 U.S. at 307.
55 Id.
56 Id.
57 Id. supra note 50, at 1-2.
58 Id. Penry’s mother almost died giving birth to him and suffered a nervous breakdown from the trauma. Id. As a result, she was committed to a mental hospital for ten months. Id. Upon her release, she returned home and began severely abusing the child she blamed for her problems. Id. Over a ten year period, Penry was burned with cigarettes, had his arm broken several times, was locked in his room for long periods of time, and was forced to consume his own feces and urine. Id.
59 Id. supra note 50, at 1-2.
60 Penry, 492 U.S. at 307-08.
62 Id.
an IQ of fifty-four.\footnote{Penry, 492 U.S. at 308.} Further, Dr. Brown stated that Penry had the mental age of a six and a half year old and the social functioning of a nine or ten year old.\footnote{Id.} Nevertheless, “the jury found Penry competent to stand trial.”\footnote{Id.}

During the guilt phase of the trial, Penry introduced an insanity defense and called Dr. Jose Garcia to testify on his behalf.\footnote{Id.} Dr. Garcia’s testimony indicated that Penry suffered from moderate retardation and organic brain damage that either was caused at birth or was the result of severe head trauma at an early age.\footnote{Id.} The doctor testified that this made it “impossible for [Penry] to appreciate the wrongfulness of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the law.”\footnote{Id.} Penry’s mother testified that he was unable to learn at school, and his sister testified to the abuse he suffered at the hands of his mother.\footnote{Id.}

In response to Penry’s asserted insanity defense, the State introduced two psychiatrists to rebut Dr. Garcia’s testimony.\footnote{Id.} Dr. Kenneth Vogtberger testified that Penry had the characteristics of antisocial personality\footnote{The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders defines Antisocial Personality Disorder as “a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others that begins in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood.” American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 706 (4th text rev. 2000). Individuals with this disorder are commonly called psychopaths or sociopaths. Id.} and that his low IQ scores underestimated his ability to function.\footnote{Id.} Dr. Felix Peebles agreed with Dr. Vogtberger’s assessment and testified that he had diagnosed Penry with mental retardation in both 1973 and 1977.\footnote{Id.} Both of the State’s experts testified that Penry “was a person of extremely limited mental ability.”\footnote{Id.}

The jury rejected the insanity defense and found Penry guilty of capital murder.\footnote{Id.} During the penalty phase of the trial, the State again called Dr. Peebles and Dr. Vogtberger to testify.\footnote{Id.} This time they asserted that should Penry ever be released he posed a high risk

\begin{itemize}
    \item \footnote{Penry, 492 U.S. at 309.}
    \item \footnote{Id.}
    \item \footnote{Id. at 310.}
    \item \footnote{Id.}
    \item \footnote{Penry v. Texas, 691 S.W.2d at 651.}
\end{itemize}
of future dangerousness and would be “a continuing threat to society.”

Penry’s attorneys “reoffered ‘all of the evidence heretofore given . . . by the witnesses . . .’” and argued that the jury should consider Penry’s mental retardation in assessing punishment. Nevertheless, the jury sentenced Penry to death.

Penry filed a writ of habeas corpus in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Texas challenging his sentence. After the district court denied Penry relief, he subsequently appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. The circuit court affirmed the decision of the lower court. The United States Supreme Court granted certiorari on the issue of whether the execution of mentally retarded offenders constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

Under the Texas Penal Code at the time of Penry’s trial, the jury decided whether or not a defendant would be sentenced to death depending upon their answers to three questions. Under Article 37.071 (b) of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure the jury was asked the following questions:

1. whether the conduct of the defendant that caused the death of the deceased was committed deliberately and with the reasonable expectation that the death of the deceased or another would result;
2. whether there is a probability that the defendant would commit criminal acts of violence that would constitute a continuing threat to society; and
3. if raised by the evidence, whether the conduct of the defendant in killing the deceased was unreasonable in response to the provocation, if any, by the deceased?

If the jury answered all three of the questions in the affirmative, then the trial court was required to sentence the defendant to death. In part, Penry argued that his sentence violated the Eighth Amendment because the trial court did not instruct the jury on how they should consider mitigating circumstances and also because the execution of the mentally retarded constituted cruel and unusual punishment.

Although the Court of Appeals questioned whether Penry was given the individualized sentencing required by the Constitution, they ultimately decided that lack of a mitigating instruction did not constitute reversible error. The court also rejected the argument that the execution of the mentally retarded qualified as cruel and unusual punishment.

The Supreme Court also granted certiorari to decide whether Penry’s constitutional rights had been violated by the absence of a mitigating instruction to the jury. On this issue, a majority consisting of Justices O’Connor, Brennan, Marshall, Blackmun, and Stevens found that the jury was not able to adequately consider all of the mitigating evidence due to both the lack of a mitigating instruction and the use of special issues to determine whether to impose...
Before the Court, Penry argued that individuals with mental retardation are not capable of the moral culpability required to justify the imposition of a death sentence. Further, he argued that there was “an emerging national consensus against executing the mentally retarded.”

A majority of the Court consisting of Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justices O’Connor, White, Scalia, and Kennedy addressed the issue of cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment. The Court noted that the Eighth Amendment applies to both those punishments prohibited at the time the Bill of Rights was adopted and those punishments prohibited by contemporary values. The Court further noted that to determine the evolving standards of decency it must look to objective evidence, including enacted legislation.

The majority acknowledged a common law prohibition against punishing “idiots” for criminal acts that has evolved into the present day insanity defense. The Court found that to qualify as “idiots” at common law, defendants would have had to show a complete lack of “capacity to appreciate the wrongfulness of their actions.” The majority, however, did not find any common law prohibition on executing mentally retarded defendants, such as Penry, who knew that their conduct was wrong and chose not to conform their behavior to the law.

the death penalty. Based on this part of the decision, Penry’s sentence was invalidated because the Court felt that the jury did not have any way in which they could consider Penny’s mental retardation as a potential mitigating factor. Id. at 328-29.

Id. at 329.

Penry, 492 U.S. at 306, 330-31. In a convoluted decision, Justice O’Connor delivered the opinion for a unanimous Court with respect to Parts I and IV-A, and the opinion of the court with respect to Parts II-A, II-B, III, and IV-B. Id. at 306. Parts II-B and III were joined by Justices Brennan, Marshall, Blackmun, and Stevens. Id. Parts II-A and IV-B were joined by Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justices White, Scalia, and Kennedy. Id. Part IV-C is solely the opinion of Justice O’Connor. Id. Justice Brennan, joined by Justice Marshall, filed an opinion concurring in part and dissenting in part. Id. Justice Stevens filed an opinion concurring in part and dissenting in part that was joined by Justice Blackmun. Penry, 492 U.S. at 306. Justice Scalia also filed an opinion concurring in part and dissenting in part that was joined by Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justices White and Kennedy. Id.

Id.

Id. at 329. The Court stated that “the clearest and most reliable objective evidence of contemporary values is the legislation enacted by the country’s legislatures.” Id.

Id. at 332.

Id. at 333.

Penry, 492 U.S. at 333.
The majority next rejected Penry’s argument that there was a national consensus against executing the mentally retarded.\footnote{Id. at 333-34.} Noting that only two states and the federal government had statutes banning such executions, the Court found insufficient evidence to support the existence of a national consensus.\footnote{Id. at 334. At the time of Penry, Georgia and Maryland were the only states that had statutes banning the execution of a person who is mentally retarded. Id. The federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 also prohibited the execution of mentally retarded offenders. Id.} The Court also rejected public opinion polls supporting Penry’s argument, finding that they provided insufficient evidence of contemporary values.\footnote{Id.}

In a concurrence, Justice O’Connor stated that the courts should consider individualized personal responsibility and not just the presence of mental retardation when determining eligibility for the death penalty.\footnote{Id. at 338 (O’Connor, J., concurring).} The Justice found that mental retardation should be only one factor considered in determining culpability.\footnote{Id.}

In dissent, Justice Brennan, joined by Justice Marshall, agreed with Penry’s argument that the Eighth Amendment prohibits the execution of the mentally retarded.\footnote{Id., 492 U.S. at 335. The Court noted that the sentiment expressed in those polls may ultimately be reflected in legislation and that such legislation would be a reliable indicator of contemporary values. Id.} The Justice contended that “the impairment of a mentally retarded offender’s reasoning abilities, control over impulsive behavior, and moral development . . . limits his or her culpability,” thus making the death penalty disproportionate to the crime and, therefore, unconstitutional.\footnote{Id. at 341 (Brennan, J., dissenting).} Further, the Justice found the execution of the mentally retarded was also unconstitutional because it does not contribute to the penal goals of deterrence and retribution.\footnote{Id. at 348 (Brennan, J., dissenting).}

The Court contrasted this situation to that in Ford v. Wainwright, where the Court acknowledged there is a national consensus against executing mentally ill offenders, and to Thompson v. Oklahoma, where the Court found a national consensus against executing defendants who were younger than sixteen at the time they committed their crimes. Id. The Court noted that at the time of Ford no states allowed the execution of insane offenders and twenty-six states had statutes that suspended the execution of offenders who became insane following sentencing. Penry, 492 U.S. at 334 (citing Ford v. Wainwright, 477 U.S. 399, 408 n.2 (1986)). In Thompson, the Court noted that eighteen states expressly prohibited the execution of offenders younger than sixteen. Id. (citing Thompson v. Oklahoma, 487 U.S. 815, 833 (1988)).
B. Legislative Response to Penry

Following Penry, the legislative landscape underwent dramatic changes.\(^{100}\) In 1989, at the time of the Penry decision, only the federal government, Georgia, and Maryland had statutes prohibiting the execution of mentally retarded offenders.\(^{101}\) In the years that followed, fifteen states passed legislation prohibiting the death penalty for mentally disabled offenders.\(^{102}\) When one considers these eighteen states in conjunction with the twelve states that do not have the death penalty, more than half of the states have banned the execution of a mentally retarded offender.\(^{103}\)

In April of 1990, less than a year after Penry was decided, both Tennessee and Kentucky passed legislation to stop the executions of mentally retarded offenders.\(^{104}\) Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and Washington soon followed.\(^{105}\) In 1994 and 1995, Kansas and New York, respectively, re-instated the death penalty but specifically excluded the mentally retarded.\(^{106}\) By 2001, Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota also banned the execution of the mentally retarded.\(^{107}\)

Much to the surprise of death penalty opponents, in March of 2001, the Supreme Court granted certiorari in the case of McCarver v.
North Carolina to revisit the constitutionality of executing mentally retarded criminals. Ernest P. McCarver was convicted of first-degree murder and robbery with a dangerous weapon and sentenced to death despite having an IQ of sixty-seven. However, before the Supreme Court could hear the McCarver case, it became moot when the North Carolina legislature passed a new statute prohibiting the execution of mentally retarded offenders. On September 25, 2001, the Supreme Court dismissed McCarver and granted certiorari to address the same question in Atkins v. Virginia.

C. Atkins v. Virginia

On August 16, 1996, Daryl Renard Atkins and William Jones kidnapped Eric Nesbitt at gunpoint, forced him to withdraw money from an ATM, and then shot him eight times. Atkins was convicted of capital murder, and the state argued for a death sentence based upon future dangerousness and the “vileness of the offense.”

During the penalty phase of the trial, the defense expert, Dr. Evan Nelson, testified that Atkins was mildly retarded with an IQ of fifty-nine. Dr. Nelson based his testimony on interviews with Atkins, his family, and jail personnel; an examination of school and court records; and a psychological assessment. Atkins v. Virginia, 534 U.S. 809 (2001).

The state indicted both Atkins and Jones for capital murder, however, Jones made a deal to testify against Atkins in exchange for life imprisonment. Atkins v. Virginia, 536 U.S. at 308 n.1. At Atkins’ trial, both Atkins and Jones testified that it was the other who actually shot and killed Nesbitt. Id. at 307. As one newspaper noted, when the jury was given a choice between believing Atkins, who “bumbled on the witness stand,” and Jones, who was smart enough not to talk to detectives and to cut a deal, Jones was the easy choice. Sara Catania, Who Should Die, L.A. WKLY., June 28, 2002, at 20.

Atkins v. Virginia, 536 U.S. at 307-08. To support these two aggravating factors, the State offered evidence of Atkins’ prior felony convictions, testimony from earlier victims, and pictures of Nesbitt’s body. Id. at 308.

Id. at 308-09.
records; and the administration of a full-scale intelligence test.\textsuperscript{117} The psychologist explained that Atkins' IQ score fell into the bottom one percent for intelligence and, in his opinion, Atkins always had limited intelligence and was not currently malingering.\textsuperscript{118} The State offered no rebuttal.\textsuperscript{119}

The jury sentenced Atkins to death,\textsuperscript{120} but because of problems with the verdict form, the Virginia Supreme Court ordered a new sentencing hearing.\textsuperscript{121} Dr. Nelson repeated his testimony at the new hearing and this time the State offered a rebuttal witness.\textsuperscript{122} Dr. Stanton Samenow testified that Atkins was not retarded, but instead suffered from antisocial personality disorder.\textsuperscript{123} The jury once again sentenced Atkins to death.\textsuperscript{124}

Based upon \textit{Penry}, the Virginia courts upheld Atkins' death sentence.\textsuperscript{125} Because of the "dramatic shift in the state legislative landscape," the United States Supreme Court granted \textit{certiorari} to revisit the issue of the constitutionality of executing the mentally retarded.\textsuperscript{126}

Justice Stevens, writing for the majority, began the decision by reviewing the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment and the evolving standards of decency test.\textsuperscript{127} The majority concluded that, under this test, it must look at current legislation, representing the judgment of the citizens, when deciding this issue.\textsuperscript{128}

The majority found that the legislative landscape had

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Id.} at 309 n.4.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Id.} at 309 n.5. Dr. Nelson testified that he had conducted over forty forensic evaluations of capital defendants and Atkins was only the second defendant he had diagnosed with mental retardation. \textit{Id.} Further, based upon his evaluation, he did not believe that the low IQ score was the result of malingering, an aberrational test score, or the result of an invalid test. Atkins, 536 U.S. at 309 n.5.
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Id.} at 309.
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Id.} Dr. Samenow's evaluation was based upon two interviews with Atkins, interviews with jail personnel, and a review of school records. Atkins, 536 U.S. at 309 n.6. Dr. Samenow never administered an intelligence test. \textit{Id.} His only testing consisted of asking Atkins several questions from an outdated version of an IQ test. \textit{Id.} Dr. Samenow attributed Atkins' terrible academic performance to a failure to pay attention and a lack of motivation. \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Id.} at 309.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Id.} at 310.
\textsuperscript{126} Atkins, 536 U.S. at 310; \textit{see also} Atkins v. Virginia, 534 U.S. 809 (2001).
\textsuperscript{127} Atkins, 536 U.S. at 311-12.
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Id.} at 312.
\end{footnotesize}
significantly changed since Penry. The Court noted that, based in part on national attention from their earlier decision, sixteen states had enacted legislation banning the execution of mentally retarded offenders and other states were considering similar legislation. The Court found significant the fact that this legislation was being approved during a time when anticrime legislation was greatly favored over legislation that protects people convicted of violent crimes. Further, the majority also noted that the practice of executing mentally retarded offenders is uncommon, even in those states authorizing such executions. Based upon these changes, the Court concluded that a national consensus against executing the mentally retarded had developed.

Justice Stevens acknowledged that there was disagreement regarding which offenders qualify as retarded. The Court, however, chose not to adopt a national standard for determining mental retardation. Instead, the Court preferred to “leave to the States the task of developing appropriate ways to enforce the constitutional restriction.”

In addition to finding that the current standards of decency do not allow for the execution of the mentally retarded, the Court also found that death penalty jurisprudence provides two additional reasons to categorically ban the execution of the mentally retarded. First, the Court found that these executions do not further the goals of retribution and deterrence, and consequently result in the “purposeless and needless imposition of pain and suffering.”

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129 Id. at 314-15.
130 Id.
131 Id. at 315-16.
132 Id. at 316.
133 Atkins, 536 U.S. at 316. In a footnote, the Court noted that additional evidence shows that the change in legislation “reflects a much broader social and professional consensus.” Id. at 316 n.21. Amici Curiae Briefs submitted in this case showed that the American Psychological Association, the American Association of Mental Retardation, diverse religious communities, and the world community all opposed the execution of mentally retarded offenders. Id.
134 Id. at 317.
135 Id.
136 Id. (citing Ford v. Wainwright, 477 U.S. 399, 405 (1986)).
137 Atkins, 536 U.S. at 318-19.
138 Id. at 319 (quoting Enmund v. Florida, 458 U.S. 782, 798 (1982)). The Court noted that previously in Gregg v. Georgia, they found that the death penalty was justified by the social purposes of retribution and deterrence. Id. at 318-19 (citing Gregg v. Georgia, 428 U.S. 153, 183 (1976)). The Court found that “the lesser culpability of the mentally retarded offender . . . does not merit that form of retribution.” Id. at 319. The Court also found that the diminished capacity of
Second, the Court recognized that offenders with reduced capacities have an increased risk of unjustifiably receiving the death penalty. Consequently, although the Court refused to define mental retardation, it found that once a determination of mental retardation was made, execution would be cruel and unusual punishment under the “evolving standards of decency” test.

In blistering dissents, both Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justice Scalia criticized the majority’s finding of a national consensus against executing the mentally retarded. The dissenters accused the majority of assessing the legislation in such a manner as to create a post hoc rationalization for the decision. Further, the dissenters heavily criticized the majority’s use of public opinion polls, and the opinions of professional organizations and religious groups to support its analysis of contemporary social values. Instead, the dissenters argued that the Court’s inquiry should be limited to legislation and the practices of sentencing juries. These factors, the dissenters argued, do not provide sufficient evidence to support a national consensus against imposing the death penalty on mentally retarded offenders.

II. MULTIPLE DEFINITIONS OF MENTAL RETARDATION

Although the Supreme Court banned the execution of the mentally retarded in Atkins, it chose not to define mental retardation. Instead, the Court left it to the states to define mentally retarded defendants makes it unlikely that the possibility of receiving the death penalty would be understood and act as a deterrent. Id. at 319-20.

Id. at 320-21. Among the possibilities acknowledged by the Court are the increased risk of false confessions, the fact that mentally retarded defendants are unlikely to be able to assist their attorneys and make poor witnesses, and the fact that a finding of mental retardation may enhance the likelihood of a jury believing in the defendant’s future dangerousness. Atkins, 536 U.S. at 320-21.

Id. at 321.

Id. at 328 (Rehnquist, C.J., dissenting); see also id. at 341-45 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

Id. at 321-22 (Rehnquist, C.J., dissenting); see also id. at 346-47 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

Atkins, 536 U.S. at 321-22 (Rehnquist, C.J., dissenting); see also id. at 347 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (stating that “the Prize for the Court’s Most Feeble Effort to fabricate ‘national consensus’ must go to its appeal . . . to the views of assorted professional and religious organizations, members of the so-called ‘world community,’ and respondents to opinion polls”).

Id. at 322-24 (Rehnquist, C.J., dissenting); see also id. at 341-48 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

Id. at 322-24 (Rehnquist, C.J., dissenting); see also id. at 341-48 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

Atkins, 536 U.S. at 317.
retardation for themselves. A survey of current state definitions shows the problems with this approach. There is no uniformity in the states’ current definitions of mental retardation, and consequently, someone who is legally retarded in one state may not be in another.

A. Statutory Definitions

1. IQ Below Sixty-five

Statutes in both Arizona and Arkansas define mental retardation as an IQ below sixty-five and “significant” impairment in adaptive behavior. There are, however, considerable differences between these two statutes. The Arizona statute defines mental retardation as “a condition based on a mental deficit that involves significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with significant limitations in adaptive functions” with an onset before the age of eighteen. Under this statute, courts hearing capital cases must appoint a licensed psychologist to conduct a prescreening evaluation of the defendant’s intelligence. If the prescreening evaluation finds an IQ of seventy-five or less, the defendant is then tested by additional experts nominated by both the State and the defense. A finding that the defendant has an IQ of sixty-five or lower establishes a rebuttable presumption that the defendant is retarded and therefore ineligible for the death penalty. In addition, if a defendant has an IQ of seventy or lower, he is permitted to establish mental retardation by clear and convincing evidence.

By comparison, Arkansas defines mental retardation as both “significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning accompanied by significant deficits or impairments in adaptive functioning” that is apparent by the age of eighteen and “deficits in adaptive behavior.” There is a rebuttable presumption that those defendants with an IQ of sixty-five or below are retarded, and therefore ineligible for a death sentence. Under Arkansas law,

147 Id.
148 See infra Part II.A.
152 Id. § 13-703.02(B) (2001).
153 Id. § 13-703.02(D) (2001).
154 Id. § 13-703.02(A), (G) (2001).
155 Id. § 13-703.02(G) (2001).
157 Id. § 5-4-618(a)(2) (Michie 2001); Ark. Code Ann. § 5-4-618(b) (Michie 2001).
however, the state is not required to assess the intelligence of capital
defendants—the burden is on the defendant to prove mental
retardation by a preponderance of the evidence.\footnote{158}

2. IQ Below Seventy

Several states have set seventy, rather than sixty-five, as the
minimum IQ for the imposition of a death sentence.\footnote{159} However, the
level of impairment in adaptive behavior required for a
determination of mental retardation varies amongst these states.\footnote{160}
Moreover, some states limit when these deficits must have become
apparent,\footnote{161} while others impose no age requirement for when the
impairments must manifest.\footnote{162}

Kentucky does not allow for the execution of offenders with
“significantly subaverage intellectual functioning” and “substantial
deficits in adaptive behavior,” \footnote{163} both of which must have manifested
during the “developmental period.” While the statute defines
significantly subaverage intelligence as an IQ of seventy or less,\footnote{164}
there is no explanation as to what constitutes a \textit{substantial} deficit, or
at what age the developmental period ends.\footnote{165}

Maryland, North Carolina, South Dakota, and Tennessee all
prohibit the execution of a defendant with subaverage intellectual
functioning, as evidenced by an IQ of seventy or below on a
standardized intelligence test,\footnote{166} and by deficits in adaptive

\footnotesize
\begin{footnotes}
\item[158] Id. § 5-4-618 (Michie 2001); see also id. § 5-4-618(c) (Michie 2001).
period is defined as the time between birth and adulthood. See Robert J. Gregory, \textit{Psychological Testing} 292 (3d ed. 2000). There is some variation among
definitions as to what age constitutes the end of the developmental period. \textit{See infra} Parts II.B-D.
\item[163] Id.
\item[164] Id.
\item[165] Id.
\item[166] An intelligence test is considered standardized when there is a uniform
functioning. In South Dakota, North Carolina, and Tennessee there must be evidence that the deficits in intelligence and adaptive functioning manifested before the age of eighteen. Maryland, however, requires the manifestation of deficits to occur before the age of twenty-two. Consequently, if hypothetical-defendant Sal’s deficits manifested at the age of nineteen, he would be considered mentally retarded in Maryland, but not in North Carolina, South Dakota, or Tennessee.

When other states are included in the comparison, the disparity becomes even more apparent. Nebraska, New Mexico, and Washington also prohibit the execution of defendants with subaverage intelligence and deficits in adaptive functioning as evidenced by a score of seventy or less on a reliable intelligence test. The legislators in Nebraska, New Mexico, and Washington, however, chose not to set an age limit for the manifestation of these deficits. Therefore, Sal, whose deficits manifested at the age of nineteen, would also be considered retarded in Nebraska, New Mexico, and Washington. Further, if Sal had an IQ of sixty-five and deficits did not manifest until the age of twenty-three, he could be executed in Maryland, North Carolina, South Dakota, and Tennessee, but not in Nebraska, New Mexico, and Washington.

3. No Minimum IQ

In addition to those state statutes that include an IQ score as part of their definition of mental retardation, many other states choose not to set a minimum statutory IQ. Instead, these statutes provide definitions that describe those deficits that qualify as mentally retarded. Standardization is important because it eliminates differences amongst different examiners and settings. Generally, standardized tests have specific directions governing administration, including the methods of administration, timing, and the proper responses to any questions posed by the test taker. See Gregory, supra note 163, at 30-31.

retarded for each state.\textsuperscript{173} The statutory definitions range from the standard requirement of subaverage intelligence and deficits in adaptive behavior\textsuperscript{174} to Kansas’ definition, which requires an inability to appreciate the criminality of one’s conduct.\textsuperscript{175}

In Colorado, Georgia, and Indiana, the statutory definition of mental retardation requires significantly subaverage intelligence that exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive functioning.\textsuperscript{176} Colorado requires these requirements to manifest and be documented during the developmental period, which the statute does not define.\textsuperscript{177} It does, however, allow the courts to waive the documentation requirement “upon a finding that extraordinary circumstances exist.”\textsuperscript{178} The Georgia statute has the same manifestation requirements but does not require any documentation showing that the deficits manifested during the developmental period.\textsuperscript{179} By comparison, Indiana requires that a court ordered evaluation finds the manifestation occurred before the age of twenty-two.\textsuperscript{180}

The definitions of mental retardation in Connecticut, Florida, and Missouri are similar, but their statutes provide different definitions for some of the terms used to define mental retardation.\textsuperscript{181} Connecticut defines subaverage intelligence as “an intelligence quotient more than two standard deviations below the mean for the test,” and requires that the test be a standardized intelligence test administered by a person with formal training in its administration.\textsuperscript{182} The Connecticut statute then defines adaptive behavior as the “degree with which an individual meets the standards of personal independence and social responsibility expected for the individual’s age and cultural group,” and the developmental period as the time

\textsuperscript{173} See, e.g., COLO. REV. STAT. § 18-1.3-1101(2) (2002); CONN. GEN. STAT. § 1-1g (2001); FLA. STAT. ANN. § 921.137 (West 2002); GA. CODE ANN. § 17-7-131 (2002); IND. CODE ANN. § 35-36-9-2 (Michie 2002); KAN. STAT. ANN. § 21-4623 (2001); MO. REV. STAT. § 565.030 (2001); N.Y. CRIM. PROC. LAW § 400.27 (McKinney 2002).

\textsuperscript{174} See, e.g., COLO. REV. STAT. § 18-1.3-1101(2) (2002); CONN. GEN. STAT. § 1-1g (2001); FLA. STAT. ANN. § 921.137 (West 2002); GA. CODE ANN. § 17-7-131 (2002); IND. CODE ANN. § 35-36-9-2 (Michie 2002); KAN. STAT. ANN. § 21-4623 (2001); MO. REV. STAT. § 565.030 (2001); N.Y. CRIM. PROC. LAW § 400.27 (McKinney 2002).

\textsuperscript{175} KAN. STAT. ANN. § 21-4623 (2001).

\textsuperscript{176} COLO. REV. STAT. § 18-1.3-1101(2) (2002); GA. CODE ANN. § 17-7-131 (2002); IND. CODE ANN. § 35-36-9-2 (Michie 2002).

\textsuperscript{177} Id.

\textsuperscript{178} GA. CODE ANN. § 17-7-131 (2002).

\textsuperscript{179} IND. CODE ANN. § 35-36-9-2 (Michie 2002).

\textsuperscript{180} CONN. GEN. STAT. § 1-1g (2001); FLA. STAT. ANN. § 921.137 (West 2002); MO. REV. STAT. § 565.030 (2001).

\textsuperscript{181} CONN. GEN. STAT. § 1-1g (2001).
from birth to eighteen years of age. Florida’s statute is almost identical, but does not specify who may administer the test to a defendant. Missouri does not specify what qualifies as subaverage intellectual functioning, but requires “limitations in two or more adaptive behaviors” defined as “communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure and work” that manifest before the age of eighteen.

The definition of mental retardation in the Kansas statute is quite different from all others. Kansas defines mental retardation as subaverage intelligence “to an extent which substantially impairs one’s capacity to appreciate the criminality of one’s conduct or to conform one’s conduct to the requirements of law.” Therefore, in Kansas, unlike all other states, a mentally retarded offender can be executed unless, as the result of his mental deficiencies, he cannot understand the criminality of his behavior or conform his behavior to the law.

B. The American Association on Mental Retardation’s Definition

In addition to the various state statutory definitions of mental retardation, several professional organizations also define mental retardation. The American Association on Mental Retardation (the “AAMR”) is an interdisciplinary organization of professionals that focuses on mental retardation. Founded in 1876, the AAMR has defined mental retardation since 1921. The AAMR continually

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183 Id.
188 Id.
190 Id. Originally, the organization was entitled “The Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions of Idiotic and Feeble-minded Children.” James W. Ellis & Ruth A. Luckasson, Mentally Retarded Criminal Defendants, 53 Geo. Wash. L. Rev. 414, 421 n.39 (1985). In 1906, the name of the association was changed to “The American Association for the Study of the Feeble-minded,” and in 1933 the name “The American Association on Mental Deficiency” was adopted. Id. By 1992, the organization was known by its present name. See generally James W. Ellis, Mental Retardation and the Death Penalty: A Guide to State Legislative Issues 6, available at www.aamr.org/Reading_Room/pdf/state_legislatures_guide.pdf (citing American Association on Mental Retardation, Mental Retardation: Definition, Classification, and Systems of Supports 5 (Ruth Luckasson ed., 9th ed. 1992)) (last
revises its definition, and published its latest comprehensive update in 2002.\textsuperscript{191}

Currently, the AAMR defines mental retardation as “a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills,” which manifests before the age of eighteen.\textsuperscript{192} When determining mental retardation, professionals must abide by the following guidelines:

1. Evaluate limitations in present functioning within the context of the individual’s age peers and culture;
2. Take into account the individual’s cultural and linguistic differences as well as communication, sensory, motor, and behavioral factors;
3. Recognize that within an individual limitations often coexist with strengths;
4. Describe limitations so that an individualized plan of needed supports can be developed; and
5. Provide appropriate personalized supports to improve the functioning of a person with mental retardation.\textsuperscript{193}

The AAMR’s intelligence criterion for diagnosing mental retardation is an IQ score of approximately seventy or below.\textsuperscript{194} Based on the standard of error that exists for most intelligence tests, however, the AAMR makes an IQ of seventy-five the cutoff for a diagnosis of mental retardation.\textsuperscript{195}

\textsuperscript{191} AAMR 2002, \textit{supra} note 189.

\textsuperscript{192} AAMR 2002, \textit{supra} note 189.

\textsuperscript{193} Id.

\textsuperscript{194} Id.

\textsuperscript{195} Id.
Adaptive behavior is defined by the AAMR as “the collection of conceptual, social, and practical skills,” which allow people to function in their everyday lives. The AAMR recommends that limitations in adaptive behavior be assessed by using standardized testing, and defines significant limitations as a score that is two or more standard deviations below the average either on a conceptual, social, or practical sub-test, or on the overall test.

The focus of the AAMR definition is on evaluating mental retardation in order to develop an individualized support plan. Supports are the “resources and individual strategies necessary to promote the development, education, interests, and personal well-being” of those with mental retardation. The AAMR definition is based on a premise that the assessment is designed to allow the professional to consider the individual’s limitations in order to create and implement an appropriate treatment plan. The definition was not created for classification purposes, but rather is part of a model meant to help each mentally disabled individual function to the best of his or her ability.

C. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Definition

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (the “DSM-IV-TR”) is a uniform and standardized system for the classification and diagnosis of mental disorders. The DSM-IV-TR, published by the American Psychiatric Association, is the definitive diagnostic tool for psychologists and psychiatrists. Its classifications are based on a systematic, empirical study of literature reviews, data analysis, and field trials. The diagnostic criteria, categories, and classification system are designed to provide a comprehensive and standardized approach to diagnosing mental disorders. The DSM-IV-TR is updated periodically to reflect advances in the understanding of mental disorders and to incorporate new research findings.

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196 Id.
197 Id.
198 AAMR 2002, supra note 189.
199 Id. Support areas include providing activities focusing on “human development, teaching and education, home living, community living, employment, health and safety, behavior, sociability, and protection and advocacy.” Id.
200 Id.
201 Id.
203 ROBERT C. CARSON ET AL., ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY AND MODERN LIFE 8-9 (10th ed. 1998). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is the “gold standard” for defining mental disorder. Id.; see also GERALD C. DAVISON & JOHN M. NEALE, ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY 59 (6th ed. 1994) (referring to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as the “current, official diagnostic system widely employed by mental health professionals”).
204 DSM-IV-TR, supra note 202, at xxvi-xxx.
descriptions are meant to be used for classification by those individuals with appropriate clinical training and diagnostic experience.\textsuperscript{205}

Based upon the 1992 AAMR definition,\textsuperscript{206} the DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria for mental retardation are:

A. Significantly subaverage intellectual functioning: an IQ of approximately 70 or below on an individually administered IQ test . . . .

B. Concurrent deficits or impairments in present adaptive functioning, . . . in at least two of the following areas: communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-direction, functional academic skills, work, leisure, health, and safety.

C. The onset is before age 18 years.\textsuperscript{207}

The DSM-IV-TR advises that, based upon the measurement error inherent in all testing instruments, an individual whose IQ is between seventy and seventy-five would still qualify as mentally retarded if he or she also exhibited significant deficits in adaptive behavior.\textsuperscript{208} Conversely, regardless of a low IQ score, mental retardation should not be diagnosed in individuals without deficits in adaptive behavior.\textsuperscript{209}

The DSM-IV-TR defines adaptive functioning as the effectiveness with which an individual can cope with the demands of everyday life and how he compares to the standards of personal independence expected in someone of a comparable age, socio-cultural background, and community.\textsuperscript{210} The Manual calls for evidence of adaptive functioning to be gathered from reliable independent sources.\textsuperscript{211} Further, the DSM-IV-TR recommends the administration of one of the available commercial tests used to assess an individual’s adaptive functioning.\textsuperscript{212}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{D. American Psychological Association’s Definition}
\end{itemize}

The American Psychological Association (the “APA”) defines...
mental retardation as “(a) significant limitations in general intellectual functioning; (b) significant limitations in adaptive functioning which exist concurrently; and (c) onset of intellectual and adaptive limitations before the age of 22 years.”\textsuperscript{213} The APA notes that this definition is essentially analogous with the current DSM-IV-TR definition and with an earlier AAMR definition.\textsuperscript{214}

The APA definition instructs that “significant limitations in intellectual functioning” should be determined based upon a score that is two or more standard deviations below the mean on a valid and “comprehensive, individual measure of intelligence that is administered in a standardized format and interpreted by a qualified practitioner.”\textsuperscript{215} Similarly, “significant limitations in adaptive functioning” should be determined through the use of “a valid and comprehensive, individual measure of adaptive behavior.”\textsuperscript{216} A diagnosis of mental retardation requires that these limitations originate before the age of twenty-two.\textsuperscript{217} The APA stresses that all three of these criteria must be met before an individual can be diagnosed with mental retardation.\textsuperscript{218}

III. METHODS OF ASSESSING MENTAL RETARDATION

Mental retardation assessments generally are conducted by trained individuals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, and involve both the use of appropriate psychological tests and in-depth clinical evaluations.\textsuperscript{219} The majority of these assessments are conducted on children for identification and evaluation of mental retardation.\textsuperscript{220} In death penalty cases, however, the evaluation of adult criminal defendants is conducted for use in the legal system.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{American Psychological Association, Manual of Diagnosis and Professional Practice in Mental Retardation} 13 (John W. Jacobson & James A. Mulick eds., 1996) [hereinafter APA].
\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Id.} at 2.
\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Id.} at 13.
\textsuperscript{216} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Id.} at 14.
\textsuperscript{219} \textit{See APA, supra} note 213, at 113.
\textsuperscript{220} \textit{See generally} DSM-IV-TR, \textit{supra} note 202, at xviii-xxvi (categorizing mental retardation as a “Disorder Usually First Diagnosed in Infancy, Childhood, or Adolescence”); \textit{Jerome Sattler, Assessment of Children} 651 (3d ed. 1992) (discussing the importance of evaluating mentally retarded children so that appropriate remedial action can be taken).
In general, psychological testing consists of following a standardized procedure to sample and categorize behavior. Although the formats of these tests vary widely, most use standardized testing procedures and defined scoring methods and, generally, results are determined by comparing the test taker’s scores against existing norms or standards. Most psychological tests are released only to qualified persons because an erroneous score from an unqualified examiner can cause harm, the previewing of test questions renders the test invalid, and the leaking of the test’s content to the general public would destroy the test’s effectiveness.

A. Intelligence Testing

Historically, individual intelligence tests measured a broad range of skills in order to estimate a person’s general intelligence. Modern intelligence tests have continued to assess intelligence by testing a wide variety of skills. Most modern intelligence tests consist of numerous subtests from which the subject’s overall intelligence score is ultimately derived. The most common full-scale, standardized intelligence tests used to assess individual adult intelligence levels are the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale-III and the Stanford-Binet: Fourth Edition.

The Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale-III (the “WAIS-III”) is one of the most widely used individualized intelligence tests. The test uses fourteen subtests to assess Full-Scale, Verbal, and Performance Intelligence. Scores on the individual subtests are converted into

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222 GREGORY, supra note 163, at 30-32.
223 Id.
224 Id. at 39-40.
225 Id. at 30-32.
226 Id. at 34.
227 Id.
228 GREGORY, supra note 163, at 177.
230 GREGORY, supra note 163, at 187. Full Scale IQ is an individual’s overall score on the WAIS-III. See id. Although there are fourteen subtests, object assembly has become optional and is only used if necessary to replace another subtest. Id. at 187. Of the thirteen main subtests, eleven must be completed in order to compute the subject’s Full Scale IQ. Id.

Verbal IQ analyzes “auditory input and vocal output.” PIERANGELO & GIULIANI, supra note 229, at 32. The subtests for computation of Verbal IQ are Vocabulary, Similarities, Arithmetic, Digit Span, Information, and Comprehension. Id. at 32-33. These subtests measure numerous abilities including attention, concentration, learning ability, reasoning skills, and memory. Id.

Performance IQ refers to an individual’s ability to perform tasks that measure
scaled scores, averaged, and then converted into an IQ score.\textsuperscript{231} The subject’s IQ score is normed based upon a mean IQ score of one hundred with a standard deviation of fifteen points.\textsuperscript{232} Representing only 2.2\% of the population, an individual whose IQ score is below seventy is considered Intellectually Deficient.\textsuperscript{233}

The WAIS-III was standardized on a large sample of adults carefully stratified to match the population figures from the 1995 United States Census.\textsuperscript{234} The test has exceptional reliability\textsuperscript{235} and validity.\textsuperscript{236} Other strengths of the WAIS-III are that its scores highly correlate with academic achievement and the test is “well organized and easy to use.”\textsuperscript{237} Some experts, however, have criticized the WAIS-III, arguing that some questions have a cultural bias and, below an IQ of forty, the test does not provide distinguishable levels of retardation.\textsuperscript{238}

In constrast, the Stanford-Binet: Fourth Edition (the “SB:FE”) is

\begin{table}
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\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
IQ Range & Classification & Percent Included \\
\hline
130 and over & Very Superior & 2.2 \\
120-129 & Superior & 6.7 \\
110-119 & High Average & 16.1 \\
90-109 & Average & 50.0 \\
80-89 & Low Average & 16.1 \\
70-79 & Borderline & 6.7 \\
69 and below & Intellectually Deficient & 2.2 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

*Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 109.*

\textsuperscript{231} Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 109.

\textsuperscript{232} Gregory, supra note 163, at 187-88. IQ scores obtained on the WAIS-III are classified as follows:

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\end{tabular}
\end{table}

*Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 109.*

\textsuperscript{233} Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 34. The WAIS-III category of Intellectually Deficient refers to anyone scoring below a score of seventy on the test. \textit{Id.} An individual scoring in that category has “significantly subaverage intellectual functioning.” \textit{See} DSM-IV-TR, supra note 202, at 41.

\textsuperscript{234} Gregory, supra note 222, at 188. The sample, consisting of 2,450 adults, was carefully stratified on the variables of race, sex, education, and geographic region. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{235} \textit{Id.} at 189; \textit{see also} Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 47. Reliability is a measure of the test’s consistency measured by the ability to replicate results. \textit{Id.} at 75.

\textsuperscript{236} Gregory, supra note 163, at 189-90; \textit{see also} Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 47. Validity is the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. \textit{Id.} at 96.

\textsuperscript{237} Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 47.

\textsuperscript{238} \textit{Id.} at 48.
based upon a hierarchical model of intelligence that is tested through the use of various subtests.\textsuperscript{239} The SB:FE contains fifteen subtests, which measure Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Abstract/Visual Reasoning, and Short Term Memory.\textsuperscript{240} The examiner totals the scores in these four areas and converts them to a composite IQ score.\textsuperscript{241} The examiner then compares the composite IQ score against a mean of one hundred with a standard deviation of sixteen.\textsuperscript{242} The SB:FE classifies a subject with an IQ of sixty-seven or below as mentally retarded.\textsuperscript{243} The developers of the SB:FE standardized the test on a sample of over five thousand subjects selected to be representative of the population in the 1980 United States Census.\textsuperscript{244} The test is representative of the target population and, for the most part, has a high reliability.\textsuperscript{245} While the SB:FE is a valid test of intellectual ability,\textsuperscript{246} it has several weaknesses.\textsuperscript{247} These include the lack of uniformity in composite scores among age groups and the fact that the SB:FE suggests time limits but does not require that they be enforced.\textsuperscript{248} Additionally, to lower testing time, the SB:FE allows the examiner to administer shortened versions of the individual subtests and this may result in a reduction of the test’s reliability.\textsuperscript{249} Also problematic is the fact that SB:FE composite IQ scores have been found to be higher than the comparative WAIS-III IQ scores by an average of seven points.\textsuperscript{250}

\textsuperscript{239} Gregory, supra note 163, at 193.

\textsuperscript{240} Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 52-53. The Verbal Reasoning Subtests are Vocabulary, Comprehension, Absurdities, and Verbal Relations. \textit{Id.} Quantitative Reasoning is tested through the Quantitative, Number Series, and Equation Building Subtests. \textit{Id.} The Abstract/Visual Reasoning Subtests are Pattern Analysis, Copying, Matrices, and Paper Folding and Cutting. \textit{Id.} Finally, the subtests of Bead Memory, Memory for Sentences, Memory for Digits, and Memory for Objects test Short-Term Memory. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Id.} at 53.

\textsuperscript{242} Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 53.

\textsuperscript{243} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{244} Gregory, supra note 163, at 194. The sample was chosen to represent the same “geographic region, community size, ethnic group, age, and sex” as the census population. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{245} \textit{Id.} at 196. The reliability of the Memory for Objects subtest is only fair, but the composite score reliability is exceptional. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{246} \textit{Id.} at 197.

\textsuperscript{247} Pierangelo & Giuliani, supra note 229, at 54.

\textsuperscript{248} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{249} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{250} Gregory, supra note 163, at 198. This means that, on average, an individual with a WAIS-III IQ score of 100 will be assessed at an IQ of 107 on the SB:FE. \textit{Id.} This can be problematic because it can lead to very different diagnostic impressions.
B. Testing Adaptive Functioning

An assessment of adaptive behavior is an evaluation of how well individuals “meet the standards of personal independence and social responsibility” expected for their age and cultural background. Diagnostic assessment instruments that measure functional ability in many areas—including communication, self-care, and social skills—are used to evaluate adaptive behavior. The subject, or a third party who is familiar with the subject, provides the information needed to make the assessment. The AAMR Adaptive Behavior Scale and the Camelot Behavioral Checklist are both well-known measures of adaptive behavior.

The AAMR Adaptive Behavior Scale (the “ABS-RC:2”) was designed to measure “an individual’s strengths and weaknesses among adaptive domains and factors.” The norm-referenced test relies on many different factors to provide a percentile score. Described as “a psychometric tour de force that borders on overkill,” the ABS-RC:2 is both reliable and valid. The test is an excellent measure of an individual’s adaptive behavior levels.

The Camelot Behavioral Checklist also evaluates the adaptive behavior in adults. The test consists of almost four hundred behavior descriptions grouped into domains and subdomains. The domain scores are converted to norm-referenced percentiles that indicate the individual’s level of functioning. The test has excellent

\[ \text{Id.} \]

It is unclear whether this is the result of the SB:FE intelligence score being too high or the WISC-III intelligence score being too low. \[ \text{Id.} \]

\[ \text{251 PIERANGELO & GIULIANI, supra note 229, at 195.} \]

\[ \text{252 Id.} \]

An examiner should focus on “communication, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, self-care, home living, social skills, leisure, and work.” \[ \text{Id.} \]

\[ \text{253 Id.} \]

The required information can be obtained from a parent, former teachers, direct service providers, or correctional facility employees. \[ \text{Id.} \]

\[ \text{254 GREGORY, supra note 163, at 236-37. Although there are many instruments that} \]

\[ \text{test adaptive behavior, these two are appropriate for both adult populations and for} \]

\[ \text{diagnosis purposes. Id. Other scales can only be used on children or for remedial} \]

\[ \text{purposes. Id.} \]

\[ \text{255 PIERANGELO & GIULIANI, supra note 229, at 196.} \]

\[ \text{256 Id.} \]

The test was normed on a sample of over 4,000 developmentally disabled individuals from forty-three states. \[ \text{GREGORY, supra note 163, at 236.} \]

\[ \text{257 Id.} \]

\[ \text{258 Id.} \]

\[ \text{at 237.} \]

\[ \text{259 Id. at 237.} \]

\[ \text{260 Id.} \]

The behavior descriptions include items such as “pours liquids,” “waxes floors,” “can boil food,” and “can do stapling jobs.” \[ \text{Id.} \]

\[ \text{261 Id.} \]

The instrument was normed on a sample of 624 developmentally disabled individuals. \[ \text{GREGORY, supra note 163, at 237.} \]
reliability and its scores highly correlate with IQ scores obtained on the WISC-III and the SB:FE.  

IV. ANALYSIS

While the Supreme Court has found the execution of the mentally retarded to be unconstitutional, the Court’s decision not to set a standard for mental retardation is problematic. The wide disparity in the current state definitions of mental retardation already results in “significant differences as to exactly who it is that is included under the protective umbrella of prohibition.” Further, the absence of uniform testing requirements often results in opposing expert witnesses using drastically different testing methods to come to contradictory conclusions.

Even a cursory examination of current statutory definitions reveals the necessity of implementing a uniform statutory definition and mandatory assessment guidelines. To that end, the AAMR definition is best suited for determining mental retardation in criminal populations. Moreover, because the field of psychology accepts these testing methods for determining intelligence and adaptive functioning, state legislators should also accept them. Statutes should require that intelligence be assessed using either the WAIS-III or the SB:FE, and that adaptive functioning be measured through the use of the AAMR Adaptive Behavior Scale or the Camelot Behavioral Checklist.

A. The Absence of a Uniform Definition of Mental Retardation

The circumstances surrounding the crimes committed by Son H. Fleming and Horace F. Dunkins are similar. Both defendants “committed notoriously brutal crimes and were classified as ‘mildly retarded,’ possessing IQs just below seventy.” Both were black

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262 Id.
264 See supra notes 116-24 and accompanying text.
265 See supra PART II.A.
266 See infra notes 292-306 and accompanying text.
267 See supra PART III.
268 Id.
270 Id. Horrace Dunkins was convicted for the rape, torture, and murder of a young mother of four. Reed, supra note 50, at 88. The victim was murdered outside of her home where her children were sleeping. Id. She was stabbed sixty-six times and left tied to a tree where her husband found her when he returned from work in
defendants convicted of capital murder by juries who were uninformed of their mental retardation. More importantly, following the Supreme Court’s decision in Penry, Fleming and Dunkins were the first mentally retarded offenders scheduled for execution. Fleming lived because he was on death row in Georgia, while Dunkins died because he had the misfortune of committing his crime in Alabama.

While this example occurred prior to the Supreme Court’s ban on the execution of the mentally retarded, today it would still be possible for Alabama to execute Dunkins regardless of Georgia’s treatment of a similarly situated offender. If Alabama adopts a mental retardation statute requiring an IQ of sixty-five or less, as is the standard in both Arizona and Arkansas, then Dunkins would still be eligible for the death penalty today. If Arizona sets the minimum IQ at seventy, like Nebraska and New Mexico, then Dunkins would live. Moreover, Alabama could adopt the same statute as Georgia, and still execute Dunkins. If, like Georgia’s statute, the new Alabama statute does not set a minimum IQ then the issue of Dunkins’ mental retardation would rest on whether or not the Alabama court believed him to be retarded—the Georgia courts’ treatment of a virtually identical prisoner would not carry any

the morning. Id. at 89. Dunkins, who never finished high school, was functionally illiterate and had the mental status of a ten-to-twelve-year old. Id.

Son H. Fleming was sentenced to death for the murder of a small town police chief. Peter Applebome, 2 States Grapple with Issues of Executing Retarded Men, N.Y. TIMES, July 13, 1989, at A12. The police chief had stopped a car driven by Fleming, unaware that Fleming and two accomplices had just committed a robbery. Id. They murdered the police chief and dumped his body in a swamp. Id. Approximately eleven years prior to the murder, Fleming, who had never learned to read or write, had received a shotgun blast to his face causing him to lose almost all of his mental capacities. REED, supra note 50, at 128.

Applebome, supra note 270, at A12.

Id.

Id. supra note 50, at 88-89. Fleming had his death sentence vacated because, unlike Alabama, Georgia law did not allow for the execution of mentally retarded offenders. Id.

Dunkins’ execution received national attention because the electric chair failed to kill him on the first attempt. Peter Applebome, 2 Electric Jolts in Alabama Execution, N.Y. TIMES, July 15, 1989, at 1. Blaming human error for the failure, the state reported that the switch had to be thrown a second time before Dunkins could be declared dead. Id.

See ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 13-703.02 (2001); ARK. CODE ANN. § 5-4-618 (Michie 2001).

See NEB. REV. STAT. § 28-105.01 (2002); N.M. STAT. ANN. § 31-20A-2.1 (Michie 2002).

See GA. CODE ANN. § 17-7-131 (2002).
Similarly, the fate of Eddie Mitchell, a death row inmate in Louisiana, depends on how the Louisiana legislature or courts define mental retardation. Following an unsuccessful attempt to borrow money from his victim, Mitchell killed the man when he struck him in the head with a stick. When questioned by the police, Mitchell waived his right to counsel and confessed to the crime. Ultimately, a jury sentenced him to death.

Eddie Mitchell has an IQ of sixty-six. As a child, he had to repeat several grades, and his classmates mocked him for his stupidity. Mitchell’s intellectual capacities are so impaired that he was unable to learn how to play baseball and his Cub Scout master reports, “on the rare occasions when he actually caught the ball, ‘he would just hold on to it, maybe kiss it, but never throw it on.’” Mitchell’s fate is in the hands of the Louisiana legislature and courts, and turns on how they choose to define mental retardation. If Louisiana chooses to set the minimum IQ for mental retardation at sixty-five, Mitchell will still be executed. A minimum IQ of seventy, however, means that Mitchell will live.

These cases illustrate the problem with the absence of a uniform definition for mental retardation. The AAMR, DSM-IV-TR, and APA definitions all provide a similar standard for the assessment of mental retardation. Consequently, the decision as to which definition to adopt is really a matter of which is the most suitable for codification and application in a criminal law context.

The APA definition is substantially similar to the DSM-IV-TR

277 See id.
280 Id. It has been reported that Mitchell believed that waiving his rights meant to wave his right hand. Human Rights Watch, supra note 278.
281 Mitchell, 674 So. 2d at 252.
282 Human Rights Watch, supra note 278.
283 Id. Mitchell had to repeat the first grade twice and the sixth grade three times.
284 Id.
285 Id. In part of a statement provided to his attorneys, in large childish letters, Mitchell wrote, “I love to shop in the store. I like ice cream very. Smile. I like horse. I like food to eat. Yes I like eat, and dog.” Id.
286 See supra PART II.B–D.
definition with the exception of the required age of onset.\textsuperscript{287} The APA specifies that the mental disability must have manifested prior to age twenty-two, while the DSM-IV-TR and the AAMR require the presence of symptoms before the age of eighteen.\textsuperscript{288} The purpose of this age requirement is to ensure that the mental retardation developed during the developmental period, as opposed to forms of brain damage that occur later in life.\textsuperscript{289}

In a criminal law setting, the age requirement serves the added purpose of “ensur[ing] that defendants may not feign mental retardation once charged with a capital offense.”\textsuperscript{290} Under this standard, faking cognitive impairment following an arrest would not be sufficient for a diagnosis because the offender’s symptoms would need to have been observed prior to the specified age.\textsuperscript{291} Given that malingering is a concern whenever you are dealing with a criminal population, both the AAMR and the DSM-IV-TR definitions are better suited to this population than the APA definition with its higher age limit.\textsuperscript{292}

The AAMR is “the principal professional organization in the field of mental retardation.”\textsuperscript{293} The AAMR’s definition of mental retardation has influenced courts,\textsuperscript{294} legislatures,\textsuperscript{295} and the DSM-IV

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{287} Compare APA, supra note 213, at 113, with DSM-IV-TR, supra note 202, at 49.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Compare APA, supra note 213, at 113, with DSM-IV-TR, supra note 202, at 49, and AAMR 2002, supra note 189. The requirement that symptoms be present should not to be mistaken for a requirement that the individual be diagnosed before the age of eighteen. See DSM-IV-TR, supra note 202, at 42; see also AAMR 2002, supra note 189. The DSM-IV-TR and the AAMR definitions do not require a diagnosis before the individual reaches the age of majority. \textit{Id}. Instead, they require that the individual exhibited signs and symptoms supported by evidence such as a review of school records, interviews with the subject and others, a review of medical records, and any other available evidence concerning the subject’s mental abilities before the age of eighteen. \textit{Id}.
\item \textsuperscript{290} James W. Ellis, \textit{Mental Retardation and the Death Penalty: A Guide to State Legislative Issues} 9, available at http://www.aamr.org/Reading_Room/pdf/state_legislatures_guide.pdf (last visited Mar. 27, 2003) (on file with author). While brain injuries occurring later in life can impair cognitive functions, the impairments caused by such injuries do not fall within the definition of mental retardation. \textit{Id}.
\item \textsuperscript{291} \textit{Id}.
\item \textsuperscript{292} \textit{Id}.
\item \textsuperscript{293} Ellis & Luckasson, supra note 190, at 421.
\end{itemize}
definition. As the AAMR’s definition has changed, similar changes appeared in both newly drafted statutes, and the DSM definitions. In all likelihood, the next version of the DSM will once again mirror the current AAMR definition of mental retardation.

Additionally, the current AAMR definition is more appropriate for the evaluation of mental retardation in criminal defendants than the DSM-IV-TR definition. The DSM-IV-TR definition describes the adaptive behavior component as “concurrent deficits or impairments in present adaptive functioning . . . in at least two of the following areas: communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-direction, functional academic skills, work, leisure, health, and safety.” The purpose of this conceptualization of adaptive behavior is to determine “how effectively individuals cope with common life demands,” so as to establish the individual’s needs for services and supports.

The AAMR definition is also concerned with the identification of mental retardation in order to develop personalized plans with individualized supports. Still, the wording of the current AAMR definition is better suited for evaluations of defendants facing the death penalty. The AAMR definition now requires that deficits manifest “in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills.” This definition requires that the disability “be manifested in real-world disability in the individual’s life” and

299 Compare AAMR 1983, supra note 191, at 11, and AAMR 1992, supra note 191, at 3, with DSM-III, supra note 296, at 36, and DSM-IV-TR, supra note 202, at 49. The latest revision of the DSM containing its present definition of mental retardation occurred in 2000, prior to the 2002 AAMR revision. DSM-IV-TR, supra note 202, at xxix. The next full revision of the DSM is not expected for several years, but it follows that the DSM-V will most likely adopt the current AAMR definition. Id.
300 DSM-IV-TR, supra note 202, at 49.
301 Id. at 42.
302 AAMR 2002, supra note 189.
303 Ellis, supra note 289, at 8.
304 AAMR 2002, supra note 189.
“focuses on broad categories of adaptive impairment,” rather than “service related skill areas.”

It is the presence of a “real-world disability” and not the formulation of a treatment plan that is of importance to the judicial system.

The DSM-IV-TR definition exists as part of a uniform and standardized system utilized by practitioners to classify and diagnose mental retardation. Consequently, the DSM-IV-TR definition provides a clear systematic approach for diagnosing mental retardation. Conversely, the AAMR created its definition to help identify those with mental retardation in order to develop a personal plan with individualized supports. Nonetheless, in light of the current AAMR definition’s better applicability in the criminal context, as well as the trend among prior legislatures in codifying AAMR definitions, the current AAMR definition provides the best standard for assessing the mental retardation of offenders facing a possible death sentence.

B. The Lack of Uniform Testing Requirements

Due in part to variable methods of assessing mental retardation prosecution and defense witnesses often come to opposing conclusions regarding a defendant’s mental capacity. In Atkins, the defense expert, Dr. Evan Nelson, concluded that Atkins was mentally retarded following test results from a full-scale WAIS-III intelligence test; interviews with Atkins, his family, and correctional officers; and a review of school records, court records, and police reports. Dr. Nelson validated Atkins’ low IQ score by looking at both “tell tales within the test that would reveal ‘faking,’” and independent information that confirmed Atkins’ life long low level of functioning. In comparison, the expert for the prosecution concluded that Atkins was of average intelligence without administering an intelligence test. Dr. Stanton Samenow simply

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305 Ellis, supra note 289, at 8.
306 Id.
308 Id. at 49. The 1992 AAMR definition upon which the DSM-IV-TR definition is based specifies that the purpose of this definition of adaptive behavior is to aid clinicians in determining the level of support and services required by the individual. AAMR 1992, supra note 191, at 15-16.
309 See supra Part II.B. The AAMR definition describes the concept of supports as a method of evaluating the needs of an individual and then adopting strategies, services, and supports that will address those needs. AAMR 2002, supra note 189.
311 Id.
312 Id. at 17-19.
asked Atkins a few questions taken from an outdated intelligence test, reviewed his school records, and interviewed the correctional staff.\textsuperscript{313} When confronted about his use of an outdated test, “Dr. Samenow replied that he was not ‘doing a full evaluation with testing.’”\textsuperscript{314} It is egregious that the State’s witness did not utilize any of the various appropriate intelligence tests before providing such crucial and important testimony.

Although best illustrated by Atkins, this discrepancy also existed during the cases of both Oliver Cruz and Ernest McCarver. When the state of Texas executed Oliver Cruz on Aug 9, 2000,\textsuperscript{315} defense experts classified Cruz as retarded based upon his IQ of sixty-four and his history of difficulties.\textsuperscript{316} Conversely, the state acknowledged that Cruz was not “very smart,”\textsuperscript{317} but prosecutors refused to acknowledge his retardation because he had once scored in the low average range on an intelligence test.\textsuperscript{318} Lawyers for Ernest McCarver argue that repeated scores on intelligence tests showed mental retardation, while the prosecution disputes that finding based in part on the assertion that McCarver carefully planned a murder.\textsuperscript{319}

The American Psychological Association’s Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (the “APA Ethics Code”) provides standards of professional conduct for psychologists.\textsuperscript{320} Although the APA Ethics Code was written specifically for APA members, the code is often applied by state boards and courts to others practicing in the field of psychology.\textsuperscript{321} The APA Ethics Code clearly states that psychologists who perform evaluations for the courts must base their assessments “on information . . . sufficient to provide appropriate substantiation for their findings.”\textsuperscript{322} Further, psychologists may not

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{313} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{314} Id. Dr. Samenow was confronted with the American Psychological Association’s ethical standards, which prohibit testing using outdated tests. Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{315} Human Rights Watch, supra note 278. The State of Texas executed Oliver Cruz for the brutal rape and murder of a twenty-four year-old woman. Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{316} Raymond Bonner & Sara Rimmer, Executing the Mentally Retarded Even as Laws Begin to Shift, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 7, 2000, at A1.
  \item \textsuperscript{317} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{318} Alicia Montgomery, Too Slow for Death Row?, SALON.COM (Aug. 9, 2000), available at LEXIS, News Library, News Group File, All.
  \item \textsuperscript{319} Anne Saker, Execution Dates Set for Three Murderers, THE NEWS AND OBSERVER, Oct. 13, 2001, at A3. McCarver was sentenced to death for the 1987 stabbing of a fellow cafeteria worker. Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{320} American Psychological Association, Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, in ETHICAL CONFLICTS IN PSYCHOLOGY 6 (Donald N. Bersoff ed., 1995) [hereinafter APA Ethics Code].
  \item \textsuperscript{321} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{322} Id. at 22.
\end{itemize}
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base their evaluations on tests and measures that are outdated and, therefore, obsolete.\textsuperscript{325}

The APA has also created the Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists (the “Specialty Guidelines”).\textsuperscript{324} The Specialty Guidelines are an aspirational model for psychologists acting as experts for the judicial system.\textsuperscript{325} They provide that forensic psychologists have an obligation to know and use current and acceptable standards of evaluation.\textsuperscript{326} Moreover, the Specialty Guidelines require that forensic psychologists must “make every reasonable effort” to conduct an adequate examination and should avoid providing testimony “about the psychological characteristics of particular individuals when they have not had an opportunity to conduct an examination of the individual adequate to the scope of the statements, opinions, or conclusions . . . .”\textsuperscript{327}

Under these guidelines, the evaluation performed by Dr. Samenow was wholly inadequate to support his conclusions and blatantly unethical. The APA Ethics Code and the Specialty Guidelines require that psychologists, who assess mental retardation for the courts, do a thorough evaluation that includes the use of all available up-to-date testing methods.\textsuperscript{328} The diagnosis of mental retardation “cannot be accomplished by casual examination or impressionistic observations.”\textsuperscript{329} A competent evaluation must involve both the skilled administration of a standardized intelligence test and a thorough assessment of adaptive behavior.\textsuperscript{330} Legislators should require the application of these standards to all expert testimony regarding whether or not a death eligible defendant is mentally retarded.

There are valid and reliable psychological tests for determining

\textsuperscript{325} Id. at 13.
\textsuperscript{324} Committee on Ethical Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists, Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists, in ETHICAL CONFLICTS IN PSYCHOLOGY 441 (Donald N. Bersoff ed., 1995) [hereinafter Specialty Guidelines].
\textsuperscript{325} Id. The Specialty Guidelines were created by the American Psychology-Law Division and Division 41 of the American Psychological Society and have been endorsed by the American Academy of Forensic Science. Id. The Guidelines have not been formally adopted by the APA and therefore are only an aspirational model for professional conduct. Id.
\textsuperscript{326} Id. at 445.
\textsuperscript{327} Id. at 447.
\textsuperscript{328} APA Ethics Code, supra note 320, at 22; see also Specialty Guidelines, supra note 324, at 445.
\textsuperscript{329} Ellis, supra note 289, at 11.
\textsuperscript{330} Id.
both intelligence and adaptive functioning. Both the WAIS-III and the SB:FE are extremely reliable individual intelligence tests, and the AAMR Adaptive Behavior Scale and the Camelot Behavioral Checklist are validated measures of adaptive behavior. Evaluations of a defendant’s mental capacity determines whether he or she will live or die, and as such, state statutes should require that expert witnesses utilize appropriate methods of testing.

CONCLUSION

Currently, states use several different definitions of and accepted procedures for testing and assessing mental retardation. This lack of uniformity is problematic because, as a practical matter, whether or not an individual is retarded will depend upon which state he is in. Therefore, even though the Supreme Court has banned the execution of the mentally retarded, someone who is not death eligible in one state because of mental retardation can still be executed in another state. This will result in the arbitrary imposition of the death penalty.

Consequently, to avoid this problem, state legislatures should all adopt the current AAMR definition as the standard for determining mental retardation. Further, they should require that the evaluation be done by an expert who bases his assessment on both a full-scale, standardized individual intelligence test and a diagnostic assessment instrument for adaptive behaviors.

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331 See supra Part III.
332 See supra Part III.A.
333 See supra Part IV.
334 In Furman v. Georgia, the Supreme Court declared that any systems for imposing the death penalty that are arbitrary and capricious are unconstitutional. 408 U.S. 238, 239 (1972).