



Maryland Citizens Against State Executions

MEDIA ADVISORY:

February 16, 2007

CONTACTS:

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WHAT: Feb. 20 Exoneree Speaking Forums: Specific locations at end of advisory

Feb 21 Events: *11:30 Press Conference with Death Row Exonerees
Lowe House Office Building
Prince George's Co. delegation room*

*1:00 Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Hearing on SB 211, Death Penalty Repeal
2 East Miller Senate Building*

*1:30 House Judiciary Committee
Hearing on HB 225, Death Penalty Repeal
Joint Hearing Room, Legislative Services Bldg*

(Annapolis) – Opponents of Maryland's death penalty will make their case for repeal on Wednesday, Feb. 21, starting with an 11:30 am press conference, followed by committee hearings in the Senate and House.

Six men who spent time on death row before being exonerated will speak at the press conference about major problems in a system that came close to putting them to death.

Some of the exonerees speaking at the press conference include:

- **Kirk Bloodsworth**, who was convicted in Maryland in 1985 for murder and rape. In 1992, testing of DNA evidence proved Bloodsworth's innocence. He was released in 1993 and pardoned in 1994. He spent over eight years in prison, two of those years facing execution. Bloodsworth is the first person to be exonerated from death row through post-conviction DNA testing.
- **Shujaa Graham**, who was framed for the murder of a prison guard in 1973 and was sent to San Quentin's death row in 1976. In 1979, the California Supreme Court overturned his death conviction and he was found innocent after a fourth trial. He has dedicated himself to community activism and has lived in Maryland for the past 25 years.

- **Randy Steidl**, who was sentenced to death in 1986 in Illinois and was released in 2004 based on new evidence that proved his innocence. He was the 18th person to be exonerated and released after having been sentenced to death in Illinois since 1977.

Chief sponsors of the repeal legislation, Sen. Lisa Gladden and Del. Samuel I. “Sandy” Rosenberg, will present the legislation at afternoon hearings. Also testifying for the bill will be members of murder victims’ families, law enforcement officials, and political and religious leaders. The bill would end capital punishment and replace it with a maximum sentence of life without the possibility of parole. Other states are moving to repeal their death penalties this year.

“The reasons to repeal Maryland’s death penalty are numerous – the proven racial and geographic bias in convictions, the impact on the victims’ families, and the costs, among others. But it’s the execution of innocent people that is the most troubling and irreversible,” said Jane Henderson, executive director of MD CASE. “After hearing the stories from innocent people who lost years of their lives on death row, it’s clear that the death penalty is broken and there is no way to fully prevent the potential for mistakes other than eliminating it altogether.”

Earlier this year, the Maryland Court of Appeals imposed a de facto moratorium on executions in the state when it halted the use of lethal injection until acceptable procedures are developed under public scrutiny and with oversight by the attorney general’s office and the legislature. Given the cost of attempting to revise these protocols, many have recommended instead repealing the death penalty altogether.

“Governor O’Malley has come out in support of death penalty repeal and has stated that he will sign the bill when it gets to his desk. We look forward to successful hearings and votes that will result in the end of capital punishment in Maryland,” Henderson said.

The day before the press conference, the exonerees will be speaking across Maryland on the evening of February 20th.

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Maryland Citizens Against State Executions is a coalition of groups and individuals united to end the death penalty in Maryland through education, grassroots action, and public demonstration.