



Maryland Citizens Against State Executions

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New Jersey Panel of Law Enforcement, Victims' Families, and Others Call for End to State Death Penalty

State-sponsored Report Comes on Heels of Execution Halts in Maryland and Other States

Maryland - The New Jersey Death Penalty Study Commission today released its findings and recommended that the New Jersey legislature replace the death penalty with life without parole. The 13-member Commission was empanelled as part of legislation that placed a one-year moratorium on executions in New Jersey pending the outcome of the study.

Study commissioners included a police chief, two prosecutors, including one representing the state prosecutor's association, the attorney general, a former state Supreme Court Justice, representatives of victims' organizations, religious leaders, and other legal experts.

"The New Jersey report paints a scathing indictment of the death penalty system, and uncovered gross flaws and problems that are common to Maryland as well," said Jane Henderson, executive director of Maryland Citizens Against State Executions.

"New Jersey's system is just like Maryland in that it is run by fallible human beings who sometimes make mistakes even under the best circumstances," Henderson continued. "The risk of error dictates a complicated, lengthy, and expensive process that harms victims' family members and drains time, energy, and money from more effective law enforcement efforts."

"New Jersey and Maryland both have small death rows, high reversal rates, and reputable public defender systems. Public opinion in Maryland is even less supportive of the death penalty than it is in New Jersey," Henderson said.

Before producing its findings, the Commission held four months of public hearings. The Commission heard from dozens of witnesses, including prosecutors, corrections experts, judges, police, religious and community leaders, exonerees, and average citizens. The vast majority called for a swift end to the state's decades-long death penalty experiment.

Notably, the report also highlights the negative impact that the death penalty has on victims' families. More than a dozen victims' families and advocates testified that the death penalty process compounded their pain by putting them through a long, extended process of trials, reversals, and retrials, and that life without parole would have been better.

The New Jersey report is just the latest in a long list of evidence that the death penalty is on its way out. In December, the Maryland Court of Appeals suspended executions because the state developed its lethal injection process without any public or legislative input or oversight. Following the Court of Appeals ruling, Governor-elect Martin O'Malley stated that the suspension paved the way for a broader discussion of whether the money spent maintaining a death penalty would be "better spent fighting violent crime and saving lives."

Also last month, executions were halted by the Governor of Florida and by the courts in California. A recent report by the Death Penalty Information Center found that death sentences dropped for the fifth straight year in 2006, and public opinion now favors life without parole over the death penalty.

"The evidence is clear," said Henderson. "Every state that studies the death penalty finds that it has failed. Marylanders prefer life without parole. Our state should repeal capital punishment instead of wasting any more energy trying to rescue what's already dead."

The report is available at http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/committees/njdeath_penalty.asp

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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.