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DEATH PENALTY FACING CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE WITH AMERICAN PUBLIC, NEW POLL FINDS

(Washington, D.C.) Because of mistakes and a lack of efficacy, the death penalty is losing the confidence of the American public, according to a new poll by RT Strategies to be released on June 9, 2007 at 12 noon EDT. Almost 40% of the U.S. population believe they would be excluded as jurors in capital cases and a strong majority (58%) believe it is time for a moratorium on the death penalty while the process undergoes a careful review. The poll was commissioned by the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC).

Almost all Americans (87%) believe that an innocent person has already been executed in recent years, and over half (55%) say that fact has affected their views on the death penalty. An overwhelming 69% of the public believes that reforms will not eliminate all wrongful convictions and executions. DPIC analyzes the poll results in a new report, *A Crisis of Confidence: Americans' Doubts About the Death Penalty*.

“Public confidence in the death penalty has clearly eroded over the past 10 years, mostly as a result of DNA exonerations. Whether it is concern about executing the innocent, beliefs that the death penalty is not a deterrent, moral objections to taking human life, or a general sense that the system is too broken to be fixed, the bottom line is the same: Americans are moving away from the death penalty,” said Richard Dieter, DPIC’s Executive Director.

The fact that 39% of Americans believe they would be disqualified from jury service in capital cases because of their moral objections raises questions about the ability of our system to provide defendants with a jury of their peers. When subgroups of the population are examined on this same question, the results are even more troubling for our criminal justice system.

Sixty-eight percent of African-Americans in this survey would exclude themselves as capital jurors; 48% of women have reached the same conclusion, and 47% of Catholics. While these latter numbers are based on sub-samples with a larger margin of error than the whole poll, they point to a problem of skewed juries that do not represent the country’s diversity.

Growing concerns about the death penalty have led to actual and de facto moratoriums in states across the country. Death sentences have dropped by about 60% in the past six years, with the number of sentences in 2006 reaching the lowest level in 33 years. Executions are down 45% in the same period, and the size of death row has declined every year since 1999.

The poll sample included 1,000 adults nationwide and the margin of error was $\pm 3.1\%$. The poll questions appear as Attachment A to *A Crisis of Confidence: Americans' Doubts About the Death Penalty* at <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/article.php?did=2349>

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The Death Penalty Information Center is a non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information concerning capital punishment.