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SENATE VOTE SIGNALS END OF DEATH PENALTY IN MARYLAND

State Poised to Become Sixth State in Six Years to Abolish Capital Punishment

WASHINGTON, DC – On March 6, the Maryland Senate passed SB 276, a bill to replace the death penalty with life without parole, by a vote of 27-20. The legislation would affect punishment for future crimes. If signed into law, Maryland would become the sixth state in six years, and the 18th state overall, to abandon capital punishment. The bill appears likely to pass the Maryland House of Delegates, and Governor Martin O'Malley has pledged to sign it.

“The vote in the Maryland Senate to end the death penalty is in line with an emerging trend away from capital punishment around the country,” said Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center. “Death sentences and executions have sharply declined, and now states are taking the final step toward eliminating the death penalty,”

The bill garnered support from a broad coalition of murder victims' families, communities of color, law enforcement officials, faith leaders, civil rights leaders, and other prominent individuals, including Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, Ben Jealous, President of the NAACP, and Kirk Bloodsworth, who was freed from the state's death row.

“With this vote, Maryland is one step closer to a system that will never execute an innocent person,” said Bloodsworth. “I know first hand how the criminal justice system can get it wrong. Today is a happy day for me and all my brothers and sisters who sat on death row as innocent death row survivors. We are all witnesses to innocence, and today is a great day for Maryland and the nation.” Bloodsworth is the Advocacy Director of Witness to Innocence, an organization working to raise awareness of the risks of wrongful executions associated with the death penalty.

Maryland has five people on death row and has carried out five executions since reinstating the death penalty in 1978. There have been no executions since 2005.

Five other states have taken action in recent years to end the death penalty: Connecticut (2012), Illinois (2011), New Mexico (2009), New Jersey (2007), and New York (2007).

Around the country, the use of the death penalty is in sharp decline:

- Nine states carried out executions in 2012, compared to 13 the year before. The number of executions in 2012 (43) was 56 percent less than the peak in 1999. The number of people sentenced to death in 2012 (78) represented a 75 percent decline since 1996, when there were 315 sentences.
- Use of the death penalty is clustered in a small number of states. In 2012, just four states (Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Arizona) were responsible for over three-quarters of the executions nationwide. Death sentences were also primarily imposed in a few areas, with four states (Florida, California, Texas, and Pennsylvania) accounting for two-thirds of the nation's death sentences.
- Bills to abolish the death penalty are being considered in many other states, including Montana, Colorado, Kentucky, Oregon, and Delaware.

To speak with Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center, about state trends or declining national use of the death penalty, please contact Elaine de Leon at 202-289-2275 or edeleon@deathpenaltyinfo.org.

To speak with Kirk Bloodsworth, contact Witness to Innocence at 267-519-4584 or kbloodsworth@witness-to-innocence.org

For information specific to Maryland's death penalty, contact Jane Henderson, Executive Director of Maryland Citizens Against State Executions, at 240-338-2579 or janehenderson@mdcase.org, or Shari Silberstein, Executive Director of Equal Justice USA, at 718-801-8942 or sharis@ejusa.org.

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The Death Penalty Information Center (www.deathpenaltyinfo.org) is a non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. DPIC was founded in 1990 and prepares in-depth reports, issues press releases, conducts briefings for the media, and serves as a resource to those working on this issue.