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Friday, March 25, 2011

House Committee Set to Hear Repeal Bill
Texas one of a dozen states considering legislation to end the death penalty

(Austin, Texas) — On Tuesday, March 29, 2011 the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee will hold a public hearing on House Bill (HB) 819, which calls for the repeal of the death penalty in Texas. The hearing will take place at the State Capitol in the John H. Reagan Building (JHR) 120 (upon final adjournment/recess of the House).

“National momentum is clearly shifting in the direction of abolition,” said State Representative Jessica Farrar, the author of HB 819, along with State Representatives Marisa Marquez and Alma Allen. “Earlier this month, Illinois became the 16th state, and the 4th in recent years, to abandon the death penalty. In addition, elected officials in at least 12 other states are considering repeal legislation this year. This hearing provides members of the Texas House of Representatives with the opportunity to engage in open dialogue about the flaws and failures of our state’s capital punishment system.”

Rep. Farrar first introduced this bill – which strikes the death penalty as a sentencing option from all relevant sections of the Texas Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure and replaces it with life in prison without the possibility of parole – in 2007. In 2009, the Subcommittee on Capital Punishment of the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee considered testimony from attorneys, religious leaders, academics, and individuals impacted directly by violent crime. Among those scheduled to testify before the full committee this year are:

- _. Chris Castillo, National Outreach Coordinator for Murder Victims’ Families for Reconciliation. Chris’s mother, Pilar Castillo, was murdered in Houston in 1991; to date, no one has been held accountable for this crime.
- _. Reverend Carroll Pickett, a Presbyterian minister who served as the death house chaplain at the Walls Unit in Huntsville for 15 years and accompanied 95 men to their deaths by execution. He was present for the first U.S. execution by lethal injection, when Charlie Brooks was put to death in Texas on December 7, 1982.
- _. Professor Dennis Longmire, Sam Houston State University, who will speak about the cost of the death penalty.

“During this time of fiscal crisis, the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP) urges all elected officials to take a good hard look at the death penalty system and ask whether this is a good use of tax payers’ dollars when there are alternative ways to protect society and punish those who are truly guilty,” said Kristin Houlé, TCADP Executive Director. “We strongly endorse HB 819 and urge the members House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee to support this important legislation.”