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DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER

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New Report Shows States Can Save Hundreds of Millions by Abolishing the Death Penalty

National Poll of Police Chiefs Ranks the Death Penalty Last Among Crime-Fighting Priorities and Least Efficient Use of Taxpayers' Money

(Washington, D.C.) A report released today by the Death Penalty Information Center concludes that states are wasting hundreds of millions of dollars on the death penalty, draining state budgets during the economic crisis and diverting funds from more effective anti-violence programs. A nationwide poll of police chiefs conducted by RT Strategies, released with the report, found that they ranked the death penalty last among their priorities for crime-fighting, do not believe the death penalty deters murder, and rate it as the least efficient use of limited taxpayer dollars.

“With many states spending millions to retain the death penalty, while seldom or never carrying out an execution, the death penalty is turning into a very expensive form of life without parole. At a time of budget shortfalls, the death penalty cannot be exempt from reevaluation alongside other wasteful government programs that no longer make sense,” said Richard C. Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center and the report’s author.

“The death penalty is a colossal waste of money that would be better spent putting more cops on the street. New Jersey threw away \$250 million on the death penalty over 25 years with nothing to show for it. The death penalty isn't a deterrent whatsoever. New Jersey's murder rate has dropped since the state got rid of the death penalty. If other states abolished the death penalty, law enforcement wouldn't miss it and the cost savings could be used on more effective crime-fighting programs,” said Police Chief James Abbott of West Orange, New Jersey. Abbott, a Republican, has served 29 years on the police force and was a member of the state commission that recommended the death penalty be abolished.

Key findings from the poll of police chiefs include:

- The death penalty was ranked **last** when the police chiefs were asked to name one area as “most important for reducing violent crime,” with only **one percent** listing it as the best way to reduce violence. The death penalty came in behind more police officers; reducing drug abuse; better economy and more jobs; longer prison sentences; and technological innovations such as improved laboratories and crime databases.

- The police chiefs ranked the death penalty as the **least efficient** use of taxpayers' money. They rated expanded training and more equipment for police officers; hiring more police officers; community policing; more programs to control drug and alcohol abuse; and neighborhood watch programs as more efficient uses of taxpayers' dollars.
- Almost 6 in 10 police chiefs (57%) agreed that the death penalty does little to prevent violent crimes because perpetrators rarely consider the consequences when engaged in violence. Although the police chiefs did not oppose the death penalty in principle, less than half (47%) would support it if a sentence of life without parole with mandatory restitution to the victim's family were available.

“We need to stop wasting money on a broken death penalty and instead spend our limited resources on solving more homicides. My brother's murder has remained unsolved for more than six years. The death penalty won't bring my brother back or help to apprehend his murderer. We need to start investing in programs that will actually improve public safety and get more killers off the streets,” said Judy Kerr of Albany, California.

The extra costs of the death penalty, beyond life sentences, are often \$10 million per year per state. If a state spent that \$10 million on hiring new police officers (or teachers) at \$40,000 per year, it could afford to hire 250 additional workers.

California spends \$137 million per year on the death penalty and has not had an execution in almost four years, even as the state pays its employees in IOUs and releases inmates early to address overcrowding and budget shortfalls. In Florida, where the courts have lost 10 percent of their funding, the state spends \$51 million dollars per year on the death penalty or \$24 million for each execution. Executions themselves are not expensive; it is the pursuit of the death penalty that carries a high price tag. The higher costs of the death penalty process -- including the costs of higher security on death row -- are unavoidable and likely to increase in light of all the mistakes that have been made in capital cases.

In 2009, 11 state legislatures (Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Texas and Washington) considered abolition bills. New Mexico abolished the death penalty and Maryland narrowed its application with costs as an issue in both states.

Both houses of the Connecticut legislature voted to end the death penalty and one house of the Montana and Colorado legislatures (where cost savings were to be allocated to solving cold cases) passed abolition bills. The trend of states reexamining the death penalty in light of the economic crisis is expected to continue.

The poll of 500 randomly-selected police chiefs was conducted from October 29 to November 14, 2008 by RT Strategies with a margin of error of +/- 5.1 for all elites. The results of the poll were publicly released for the first time today.

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The Death Penalty Information Center is a non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. The Center was founded in 1990 and prepares in-depth reports, issues press releases, conducts briefings for journalists, and serves as a resource to those working on this issue. The Center is widely quoted and consulted by all those concerned with the death penalty.