

Media Advisory for:
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MARYLAND LEGISLATORS POISED TO VOTE ON DEATH PENALTY REPEAL

State May Become Sixth Since 2007 to End Capital Punishment

(Washington, DC) The Maryland Senate is expected to take an historic vote in the coming days on a bill to replace the death penalty with a sentence of life without parole. On February 21, the bill (SB 276) passed the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee (6-5), preparing the way for votes in the Senate and House of Delegates. The legislation would repeal the death penalty for future crimes.

“Maryland’s reconsideration of the death penalty is in line with a clear trend across the country,” said Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center. “As significant concerns about executing the innocent, the high cost of the death penalty and its unfair application continue to grow, more states are turning to alternative punishments.”

Maryland’s House of Delegates, where support for repeal is reportedly stronger than in the Senate, is expected to vote shortly after the Senate. The governor has indicated he would sign the repeal into law.

Among those who testified in support of the repeal legislation was Vicki Schieber, a Maryland resident whose daughter was murdered in Philadelphia in 1998. The bill has garnered support from a coalition of murder victims’ families, communities of color, law enforcement officials, faith leaders, civil rights leaders, and other prominent individuals, including Governor Martin O’Malley, Kirk Bloodsworth, who was freed from the state’s death row, Catholic Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, and Ben Jealous, President of the NAACP.

If SB 276 becomes law, Maryland will become the sixth state in six years to end the death penalty. Connecticut (2012), Illinois (2011), New Mexico (2009) and New Jersey (2007) previously voted to abolish the death penalty. In 2004, New York’s death penalty law was declared unconstitutional and the last inmate was removed from the state’s death row in 2007. Other states, including Colorado, Montana, and Nebraska, are considering bills to repeal the death penalty in 2013.

In its **2012 Year End Report**, the Death Penalty Information Center reported that use of the death penalty has sharply declined nationwide. Only nine states carried out executions in 2012, equaling the fewest number of states to do so in 20 years. The number of executions in 2012 (43) was 56 percent less than the peak in 1999. Seventy-eight people were sentenced to death in 2012, representing 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.

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>.

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.