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New Jersey Senate passes bill to suspend executions

**Bipartisan vote is part of growing state and national trend away
from the death penalty**

Trenton – By a vote of 30-6, the New Jersey State Senate today approved S-709, legislation calling for an immediate moratorium on all executions in New Jersey and creating a new study commission which will examine the flaws in the State's current death penalty system. Should S-709 become law, New Jersey would become the first State to legislatively impose a moratorium on the death penalty.

“By its action today, the Senate has signaled its deep concern with the State's current death penalty system and sent a clear message that the death penalty just does not work,” said Celeste Fitzgerald, Director of New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, a statewide organization that advocates replacing the death penalty with life without parole.

“This vote underscores what a growing number of New Jerseyans have come to realize; the death penalty risks executing the innocent, is unfairly applied, fails victims' families and law enforcement, and wastes millions of taxpayer dollars,” said Fitzgerald.

As required by S-709, the new study commission shall be composed of 13 members and will submit its findings by November 15, 2006. It will examine critical issues such as racial and geographic bias, cost and whether alternatives exist that will both ensure public safety and address the needs of victims' families.

New Jersey's action comes amidst a growing chorus of concern about the death penalty across the country. Cases of have been re-opened in Missouri and Texas because of evidence that those states may have executed innocent men. A Virginia death sentence was commuted to life in prison without parole after DNA evidence was destroyed in the case, and yesterday the Virginia Governor ordered further review of 660 boxes of evidence. Voices including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the editorial board of Alabama's largest newspaper, and the President of the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission

of the Southern Baptist Convention have recently expressed concerns about capital punishment.

New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (NJADP) is a statewide grassroots organization with over 10,000 members that since 1999 has campaigned for an end to the death penalty in New Jersey. It is the core group of more than 200 New Jersey organizations, representing interests such as labor, justice, education, business, human rights, and virtually every religious denomination in the state.

For more information, see www.njadp.org.

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