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DEATH ROW EXONERATIONS REACH RECORD NUMBERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Questions of Innocence Fuel National Debate as Inmates are Cleared in Ohio, Missouri, and Pennsylvania

WASHINGTON, DC -- Three former death row inmates have recently been cleared of all charges and freed in Ohio and Missouri. A fourth inmate awaits further action in Pennsylvania after DNA tests conclusively excluded him from a murder and rape after 21 years. The Death Penalty Information Center's list of exonerations from death row since 1973 now stands at 111. As the troubling circumstances of these cases continue to fuel the national debate about the reliability of the death penalty, the total number of death row exonerations in 2003 has reached nine, the greatest number in the past 15 years.

"With these most recent exonerations, it is increasingly clear that the death penalty is falling apart at the seams," said Richard C. Dieter, DPIC Executive Director. "There is no question that additional cases of innocence remain uncovered on America's death rows. A national moratorium on all executions is the only response that addresses the gravity of these injustices."

Among the most recent additions to DPIC's list of death row exonerees are Timothy Howard and Gary Lamar James. The two Ohio men spent a quarter century in prison, including time on Ohio's death row, before all charges against them were dropped. Howard and James maintained their innocence since their arrest in 1976, and were freed, according to Franklin County Prosecutor Ron O'Brien, "in the interest of justice." The seven-year effort to exonerate the men was led by their attorneys in conjunction with Centurion Ministries. Attorneys for Howard and James presented prosecutors with new evidence, including fingerprints, witness

statements, and polygraph results that were not available during the original trial that resulted in the pair being sentenced to death.

The third person freed from death row is Joseph Amrine of Missouri. Amrine's case, which has drawn significant national attention for many years, was primarily based on inaccurate witness testimony. The testimony was particularly suspect because it came from jailhouse informants, many of whom later recanted their stories, and prison guards who were not directly involved in the incident for which Amrine was tried. Prior to his release from prison, Amrine spent 17 years on Missouri's death row.

It is anticipated that Pennsylvania death row inmate Nicholas James Yarris will become the next person to be freed. At a press conference on July 28, 2003, his attorneys revealed that three separate DNA tests excluded Yarris from the rape and murder for which he was convicted. Yarris, 41, has spent 21 years on Pennsylvania's death row, and has always maintained his innocence. The state does not dispute the DNA results, and a request is pending for the prosecutor's office to officially drop charges. Yarris would be the state's first exoneration based on testing of DNA evidence.

The six exonerations occurring earlier in 2003 involved inmates from Illinois, Louisiana, and Florida. For more information about the cases listed in this press release, please contact Brenda Bowser at 202-293-6970 or bbowser@deathpenaltyinfo.org.

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