DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER

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CALIFORNIA HOLDS ON TO DEATH PENALTY, BUT VOTE DEMONSTRATES SHARP EROSION IN SUPPORT

Close Vote on Repeal Part of National Trend Away from Capital Punishment

WASHINGTON, DC – On November 6, 2012, California's Proposition 34, an initiative to replace the death penalty with a sentence of life without parole, was narrowly defeated by a vote of 53% to 47%. Although the vote means the death penalty will continue in the state, the percent of voters supporting repeal represents a dramatic shift away from the death penalty.

"The results of the referendum in California are a clear indication that an increasing number of voters have changed their minds on the death penalty," said Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center. "Such a costly, ineffective system no longer has the support of a large majority of the public."

The California vote follows a broader trend of diminishing public support for the punishment. By contrast, the 1978 ballot initiative that enacted California's death penalty statute passed with the support of 71% of the voters. In 1986, California Chief Justice Rose Bird was removed from office by 67% of voters because she was perceived as blocking the death penalty.

Nationally, support for the death penalty in the Gallup Poll has dropped from 80% in 1994 to only 61% most recently. Moreover, when respondents are given alternatives such as life without parole, support for the death penalty falls below 50%.

California's use of the death penalty has declined in recent years. Death sentences in California have dropped from 40 in 1981 to only 10 in 2011. California has not carried out an execution since 2006. This declining use of the death penalty is in line with a broader national trend:

- New death sentences dropped to 78 in 2011, representing a dramatic 75% decline since 1996, when 315 individuals were sentenced to death. It was the first time since 1976 that the country produced fewer than 100 death sentences in a

single year.
- Executions have steadily decreased nationwide, with 43 in 2011 and 46 in 2010, representing a 56% decline since 1999, when there were 98.
- In recent years, Connecticut, Illinois, New Mexico, New York and New Jersey abolished the death penalty.

Executions in California are not likely to resume soon as questions related to the method of execution and the overall fairness of the system need to be resolved. The costs of the death penalty are likely to play a prominent role in its future in the state.

To speak with Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center, about the costs, trends, or declining national use of the death penalty, please contact Elaine de Leon at 202-289-2275 or edeleon@deathpenaltyinfo.org.

For more information specific to Proposition 34, contact Erin Mellon at erin@safecalifornia.org or 650-793-3696.

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.

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