



## Death Penalty Information Center

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### **ILLINOIS LEGISLATURE VOTES TO REPEAL THE DEATH PENALTY, CONTINUING A NATIONAL TREND AWAY FROM CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

#### *Illinois Poised to Become 16<sup>th</sup> State to Ban Capital Punishment*

WASHINGTON, DC – The Illinois Senate today joined the House in voting to repeal the state’s death penalty and re-allocate funds remaining in the Capital Litigation Trust Fund to a fund for murder victims’ services and law enforcement. If signed into law, Illinois would become the 16<sup>th</sup> state to abandon capital punishment and would mark the fewest states with the death penalty since 1978. The bill must be signed by Governor Pat Quinn in order to become law.

“This vote demonstrates a growing concern about the death penalty and public willingness to replace this punishment with alternative sentences,” said Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center. “The problems of the death penalty are not unique to Illinois. Widespread frustration with capital punishment and its high costs have led to a sharp decline in its use.”

Since 1976, Illinois has carried out 12 executions. In the same period, 20 inmates have been exonerated from the state’s death row, the second highest number in the United States. The state has not had an execution since 1999, the year before former Republican Governor George Ryan declared a moratorium on executions after a series of exonerations exposed flaws in the system. In 2003, Governor Ryan issued a blanket commutation, reducing the sentences of 167 death row inmates to life and pardoning four inmates. Since then, use of the death penalty has declined sharply in Illinois. In the 1990s, the state averaged over 10 death sentences a year. In 2009 and 2010, the state imposed only one death sentence each year.

Many murder victims’ families were among the strongest supporters of the repeal bill. In a letter to the Illinois General Assembly, murder victims’ families and friends said, “A legal system that wasn’t bogged down with committing tremendous resources on capital cases could prosecute and sentence countless other crimes and take dangerous people off the streets before they commit murder. Dollars saved could be put toward counseling for victims of crime or other services we desperately need as we attempt to get on with our lives.” The letter was signed by more than 20 individuals who had loved ones murdered in Illinois.

The high cost of the death penalty was a concern highlighted in the legislative debate. Since 2003, the state has spent over \$100 million on the Capital Litigation Trust Fund, a sum that represents only a portion of the costs associated with implementing the death penalty in Illinois.

The Illinois vote is in line with a broader trend away from the death penalty around the country:

- New Mexico and New Jersey recently voted to abolish the death penalty in 2009 and 2007, respectively. Many other state legislatures have considered bills to abolish the death penalty.
- New York's death penalty law was declared unconstitutional in 2004. Since then the legislature has repeatedly rejected attempts to reinstate capital punishment.
- Death sentences in the United States have dropped by over 60% since the mid-90s. Even in Texas, the nation's most active death penalty state, death sentences have declined significantly during the past decade. Executions have also dropped sharply.

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For more information on the Illinois repeal bill, contact Jeremy Schroeder, Executive Director of the Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, at (312) 673-3816 or [jeremy@icadp.org](mailto:jeremy@icadp.org).

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](mailto:edeleon@deathpenaltyinfo.org).

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. 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. DPIC is widely quoted and consulted by all those concerned with the death penalty.

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