



Death Penalty Information Center

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NEW MEXICO'S LEGISLATURE VOTES TO ABOLISH DEATH PENALTY- PART OF NATIONAL TREND AWAY FROM CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Victims' Families May Receive More Support from Money Saved

WASHINGTON, DC – On Friday, March 13, the New Mexico Senate joined the House in voting to replace the state's death penalty with the sentence of life without parole. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson has indicated he is open to signing the bill. If signed into law, New Mexico would become the 15th state to abandon capital punishment and the 3rd in the last 2 years.

Murder victims' families were among the strongest advocates of the repeal bill. Cathy Ansheles of Santa Fe and a member of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation, reacted to the bill's passage, "It's a great relief to know that families will no longer be put through the turmoil of the death penalty. Finally, resources can be directed to where they will really do the most good."

Representative Gail Chasey, the bill's sponsor, said the death penalty offered "false hope for victims." She told fellow legislators about former New Mexico police officer Maurice Moya, who spoke against the death penalty after tragically losing his daughter-in-law in 2006. Moya said he knew the death penalty did not work and would not bring "closure to his family." Representative Eleanor Chavez testified that when her cousin was murdered, "nobody in my family wanted the death penalty for that person."

The high costs of the death penalty were also cited as a reason for repeal. Rep. Chasey said, "People will say we can't put a price on justice, but in fact, we do put a price on justice when we are not able to give our district attorneys, our police departments, our attorney general the funding they need." Supporters of the measure are encouraging New Mexico's lawmakers to use the savings gained from ending the death penalty to provide reparation to children of murder victims and other services for families. A statewide poll in 2008 showed that 64% of New Mexicans supported replacing the death penalty with life without parole and restitution to victims' families.

Many legislators were concerned about the possibility of executing the innocent. Nationally, 130 people have been exonerated and freed from death row since 1973, including four from New Mexico.

There are other signs that the country is moving away from the death penalty:

- New Jersey's legislature voted to abolish the death penalty in 2007.
- New York's death penalty law was declared unconstitutional in 2004. Since then the legislature has repeatedly rejected all attempts to reinstate capital punishment.
- Death sentences in the United States have dropped by 60% since 1999. Even in Texas, death sentences have declined significantly during the past decade.
- Last year, there were 37 executions, the lowest in 14 years; 95% of them were in the South.

“This vote demonstrates the growing concerns that the public has about the death penalty,” said Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center. “The problems of the death penalty are not unique to New Mexico. Widespread frustration with capital punishment has led to a sharp decline in its use.”

Facing tough choices on how to save money, other states are considering death penalty repeal. Republican state Senator Carolyn McGinn sponsored Kansas' bill to end the death penalty, urging fellow legislators to ask “whether the death penalty is worth the higher costs,” given that no execution has been carried out there in 40 years. Colorado has introduced a similar repeal bill based on cost, which allocates all of the savings gained by repealing the death penalty toward solving its backlog of cold cases.

For more information on the New Mexico repeal bill, contact Viki Elkey, Executive Director of the New Mexico Coalition to Repeal the Death Penalty, at (505) 205-3750 or (505) 986-9536.

To speak with Richard Dieter about the costs, trends, or declining national use of the death penalty, contact Corinne Farrell, Death Penalty Information Center, (202) 289-2275.

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