



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **House Committee Set to Hear Repeal Bill**

*Texas one of 17 states considering legislation to end the death penalty*

**(Austin, Texas)** — Today, Monday, April 29, 2013, the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee will hold a public hearing on House Bill (HB) 1703, which calls for the repeal of the death penalty in Texas. The hearing will take place in the Capitol Extension Room E2.036 upon final adjournment/recess of the House.

“National momentum clearly has shifted in the direction of abolition,” said State Representative Jessica Farrar (District 148 – Houston), the author of HB 1703, along with State Representatives Alma Allen (District 131 – Houston) and Lon Burnam (District 90 – Fort Worth). “This spring, Maryland became the sixth state in six years to abandon the death penalty and legislators in Delaware are poised to do likewise. Elected officials in at least 16 other states are considering repeal legislation this year. This hearing provides members of the Texas House of Representatives with the opportunity to hear diverse perspectives on the death penalty and engage in open dialogue about the flaws and failures of our state’s capital punishment system.”

Rep. Farrar first introduced this bill in 2007; it strikes the death penalty as a sentencing option from all relevant sections of the Texas Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure and replaces it with life in prison without the possibility of parole. In 2009, this bill received a hearing before the Subcommittee on Capital Punishment, and in 2011 the full House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee considered testimony from a variety of stakeholders, including religious leaders and murder victim family members. Among those scheduled to testify before the committee this year are:

- Anthony Graves, a motivational speaker and legal consultant who spent 18 years in prison – including 12.5 years on death row – for a crime he did not commit. After facing two execution dates, he was exonerated and released from custody in October 2010.
- Reverend Carroll Pickett, a Presbyterian minister who served as the death house chaplain at the Walls Unit in Huntsville for 15 years and accompanied 95 men to their deaths by execution. He was present for the first U.S. execution by lethal injection, when Charlie Brooks was put to death in Texas on December 7, 1982.
- Martha Cotera and Stephen Bishop, Austin residents who have lost loved ones to murder and who oppose the death penalty.

“Texas is already moving away from the death penalty – as evidenced by the 75% decline in new death sentences over the last decade – yet this punishment is still applied in a geographically isolated and arbitrary manner,” said Kristin Houlé, Executive Director of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. “Members of the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee can hasten its demise by supporting House Bill 1703.”

To arrange an interview with any of these witnesses, please contact Kristin Houlé at 512-552-5948.

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