

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Kristin Houlé, TCADP Executive Director
512-441-1808 (office); 512-751-7009 (cell)

Illinois repeals the death penalty
Bipartisan action part of growing national trend away from the death penalty

The Illinois Governor today signed a bill to repeal the death penalty and reallocate funds from its Capital Litigation Trust Fund to provide law enforcement training and services to families of homicide victims. This makes Illinois the fourth state in the country to repeal the death penalty since 2005, following New York, New Jersey, and New Mexico.

The Illinois House passed the bill with a vote of 60-55 on January 6, and the Illinois Senate passed the bill 32-25 on January 11. Both votes were bipartisan.

“Illinois joins the growing list of states that recognize that the death penalty simply does not work,” said Kristin Houlé, Executive Director of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP). “Illinois has been under a moratorium for ten years, has had two study commissions, and passed dozens of reforms to try to ‘fix’ the death penalty. Despite these efforts, the system has continued to make mistakes while costing millions of dollars and dragging victims’ families through an endless ordeal.”

“The flaws and failures of the Illinois death penalty system are not unique,” Houlé continued. “Here in Texas, 12 people have been released from death row due to evidence of their wrongful conviction, and doubts about potentially wrongful executions continue to plague the system.”

Illinois was the first state to impose a moratorium on executions in January 2000, sparking a new national conversation on the death penalty that has continued throughout the decade. Illinois also was the first state to shine a spotlight on the death penalty’s flaws, and many states have made changes since then. Today Illinois continues to set the example for the nation in determining that the only truly effective way to address the problems with the death penalty is to get rid of it altogether.

Illinois’ action comes on the heels of a new national report by the Death Penalty Information Center that found executions and death sentences at an all time low in 2010. These trends hold true for Texas, as well. Last year, Texas juries imposed only eight new death sentences, a historic low. Overall, new death sentences in this state have dropped more than 70% since 2003.

Over the last five years, three other states have repealed the death penalty, while fifteen more have given serious consideration to repeal legislation. Several states more will consider doing away with the death penalty in 2011. A national poll by the Death Penalty Information Center found that nearly two-thirds of the public prefer alternatives such as life without parole over the death penalty.

TCADP is a statewide grassroots membership organization with 14 chapters across the state.

SPOKESPEOPLE AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT:

For the Illinois perspective: Jeremy Schroeder, Executive Director, Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, 312-213-4142 or jeremy@icadp.org

For the Texas perspective: Kristin Houlé, Executive Director, Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, 512-441-1808 (office); 512-751-7009 (cell); or khoule@tcadp.org.

For the national perspective: Diann Rust-Tierney, National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (202-331-4090 or diann@ncadp.org) or Shari Silberstein, Equal Justice USA (718-801-8942 or sharis@ejusa.org)

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