



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Texas House Committee to Hear Death Penalty Repeal Bill

(Austin, Texas) — Today, Monday, April 17, 2017, the Texas House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee will hold a public hearing on House Bill (HB) 1537, which would repeal the death penalty in Texas. The hearing will take place in the Capitol Extension Room E2.014 at 2:00 PM or upon final adjournment/recess of the House.

“National momentum continues to shift in the direction of abolition,” said State Representative Jessica Farrar (House District 148 – Houston), the sponsor of HB 1537. “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.”

Representative Farrar has sponsored death penalty repeal legislation in every session since 2007. The bill 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. HB 1537 is jointly authored by State Representative Alma Allen (House District 131 – Houston) and State Representative Donna Howard (House District 48 – Austin). An abolition bill also has been filed in the Texas Senate –Senate Bill 597 by State Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (Senate District 27–Brownsville).

“The landscape in Texas has changed dramatically as use of the death penalty declines by every measure. Death sentences have dropped from a peak of 48 death verdicts in 1999 to 3 new sentences in 2016, the fewest sentences on record for the second consecutive year,” said Kristin Houlé, Executive Director of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP). “Both prosecutors and jurors are accepting the alternative sentencing option of life in prison without the possibility of parole.”

The seven executions carried out in Texas last year were the fewest in two decades. To date in 2017, the State of Texas has executed four people. The execution of Paul Storey, scheduled for April 12, was stayed by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The parents of the victim, Jonas Cherry, strongly opposed the execution and called for Storey’s sentence to be commuted.

Over the last year, numerous religious and civic organizations have adopted positions endorsing abolition of the death penalty. These include the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and, most recently, the American Nurses Association. In addition, all five United Methodist Conferences in Texas have passed resolutions reiterating the Church’s longstanding opposition to the death penalty.

“Attitudes are shifting as public confidence in the criminal justice system erodes, and the number and diversity of voices raising concerns about the application of the death penalty continues to grow,” said Houlé. “We urge the members of the Texas House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee to confront the realities of this irreversible punishment and to reconsider the fairness and cost of the death penalty as a means of achieving justice.”

For more information about the hearing or Texas death penalty developments, please contact Kristin Houlé at 512-441-1808 (office) or 512-552-5948 (cell).

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