



Maryland Citizens Against State Executions

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 25, 2007

CONTACTS:

Jane Henderson, 240-338-2579

Laura Hayes, 301-656-0348

Death Penalty Repeal Legislation Introduced in Maryland House and Senate

*Maryland Advocates, Victims' Family Members, Political and Religious Leaders Hail
Sen. Gladden and Del. Rosenberg's Repeal Bill*

(ANNAPOLIS) – Maryland Sen. Lisa Gladden and Del. Samuel I. Rosenberg today introduced legislation to replace Maryland's death penalty with a prison sentence of life without parole.

A diverse group of supporters, including murder victims' family members, political and religious leaders and exonerated Marylanders wrongfully convicted of crimes, joined the legislators at a press conference to call on the General Assembly to act this year to end capital punishment in the state.

"Support for repeal of capital punishment is growing nationwide and it's growing in Maryland," said Jane Henderson, executive director of Maryland Citizens Against State Executions. "A majority of Maryland residents support replacing the death penalty with life without parole, which the public believes is more effective, keeps us safe, and does not risk executing an innocent person."

The legislation would end the use of capital punishment and would instead make life without the possibility of parole the maximum punishment in murder cases.

"Quite simply, the death penalty is broken beyond repair in Maryland and across the country," said Delegate Rosenberg. "It cannot be fixed. Our bill would repeal Maryland's death penalty and replace it with an extremely harsh punishment – life without the possibility of parole."

Momentum for repeal has been growing in Maryland as concerns about wrongful convictions and unfairness have shaken public confidence in the death penalty system. A 2003 University of Maryland study found ongoing racial and geographic discrimination in the state's capital punishment system.

"The decision about who lives and who dies should not be driven by race or geography," said Henderson. "The governor has expressed repeatedly that the death penalty is a failed policy that does not work and Marylanders agree. This bill gives the legislature an opportunity to turn that widespread recognition into policy."

Fueling the momentum for repeal are the scores of innocent men and women who have walked free in the last decade after being sentenced to death or to life in prison for crimes they did not commit.

“The use of scientific evidence to prove innocence has really changed the dynamic of the death penalty issue,” said Sen. Gladden. “It is inevitable that the state will execute an innocent person and all of us will have blood on our hands.”

The introduction of the death penalty repeal legislation comes only weeks after a state-sponsored commission made up of law enforcement officials and victims’ family members recommended replacing New Jersey’s death penalty with life without parole – a recommendation that echoes the provisions of the Maryland legislation.

Also last month, the Maryland Court of Appeals halted executions because the state’s lethal injection procedures were developed without oversight by the legislature and the public. Given the costs and procedural challenges of revising these execution protocols, many have instead called for simply repealing the death penalty.

“Lethal injections are on hold in Maryland, California, Florida, and seven other states. The complications surrounding lethal injection are likely to continue for years to come. The legislature should avoid this legal quagmire and save millions of the taxpayers’ dollars by moving now to replace the death penalty with life without parole,” Henderson said.

Maryland’s repeal legislation will next be considered in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and the House Judiciary Committee.

###

Maryland Citizens Against State Executions is a coalition of groups and individuals united to end the death penalty in Maryland through education, grassroots action, and public demonstration.