

MD Citizens Against State Executions
Media Coverage following Introduction of Repeal Legislation

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Maryland Lawmakers Call For End To Death Penalty

AP

Maryland considers repeal of death penalty

By Brian Witte

January 26, 2007

ANNAPOLIS -- Maryland lawmakers said yesterday they will introduce legislation to repeal the death penalty, a measure Gov. Martin O'Malley said he would sign if the General Assembly approves it.

State Sen. Lisa A. Gladden and Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg, Baltimore Democrats, are sponsoring bills that would replace the state's death penalty with a prison sentence of life without parole.

Mr. O'Malley, a Democrat who personally opposes the death penalty, said he "sure would" sign such a bill in favor of life without parole.

"We waste a lot of money pursuing a policy that doesn't work to reduce crime or to save lives, but we could be putting that money into crime reduction," Mr. O'Malley said. "I'm much more in favor of life without parole."

Former Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., a Republican, supported capital punishment. He reinstated the death penalty after taking office in 2003, refusing to uphold a moratorium by former Gov. Parris N. Glendening, a Democrat.

Michael Paranzino, executive director of Throw Away the Key, which supports capital punishment, said a debate on the death penalty is needed.

"It's better to debate this in the open," he said. "We will be educating the lawmakers about the victims of murder. While I think that it's a difficult task, I don't think it's impossible."

Mrs. Gladden and Mr. Rosenberg think support for a repeal has increased, but said more votes are needed to get the measure through both chambers.

Kirk Bloodsworth, a Maryland man who spent two years on death row and was later released from prison because of DNA evidence, said yesterday he was "living proof that the criminal justice system makes serious mistakes."

Mr. Bloodsworth was convicted twice of killing a 9-year-old girl in 1984. He was placed on death row following his first trial. Mr. Bloodsworth was convicted again in a second trial, but received a life sentence instead of capital punishment. He was exonerated by DNA evidence in 1993.

Mrs. Gladden said the Bloodsworth case demonstrated a need for ending capital punishment.

The proposed legislation follows a recent Maryland Court of Appeals decision to stop the use of lethal injection in executions until acceptable procedures are developed with oversight by the Attorney General's Office and the state legislature. The decision came just days after executions were stopped in California and Florida over concerns that lethal injections might constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

No death sentences can be carried out in Maryland until the injection issue is resolved. Delegate Anne Healey, co-chairman of the joint legislative committee that would hold hearings on the injection protocol, said the governor will decide whether members should take up the review. Mrs. Healey, a Prince George's Democrat, said she hasn't heard from Mr. O'Malley on the issue.

Mrs. Healey, who opposes the death penalty, said she's not sure lawmakers want to wade into such a divisive debate this year.

Senate Minority Leader David R. Brinkley, a Frederick and Carroll counties Republican, thinks the lethal-injection review should be taken up to affirm the use of capital punishment in the state. However, he doesn't think the committee would bother this session, because lawmakers want to focus on budget issues.

"I think it's going to put it on the back burner," he said.

Another issue is a University of Maryland study released in 2003 that found those who murder a white person are twice as likely to get a death sentence than those who murder a black person.

There are six inmates on Maryland's death row.

-- Vernon Evans Jr. was sentenced May 15, 1984, in Baltimore County. He and Anthony Grandison were convicted in the shooting deaths of David S. Piechowicz and Susan Kennedy at a Pikesville motel.

-- Mr. Grandison was sentenced June 6, 1984, in Baltimore County.

-- John Booth-El was sentenced Oct. 18, 1984, in Baltimore. He fatally stabbed an elderly couple, Irvin and Rose Bronstein, in their home.

-- Heath W. Burch was sentenced March 29, 1996, in Prince George's County. He killed a neighbor, Robert F. Davis, and his wife, Cleo, during a botched late-night robbery.

-- Jody L. Miles was sentenced March 19, 1998, in Queen Anne's County. While collecting a debt for a loan shark, Miles fatally shot Edward J. Atkinson in the back of the head in the woods in Mardela Springs.

-- Lawrence Borchardt was sentenced May 23, 2000, in Anne Arundel County, where the case was moved from Baltimore County. Five years later, Borchardt was granted a new sentencing hearing. Arguments to appeal this ruling are scheduled for next month. During a home-invasion robbery, he killed an elderly couple, Joseph and Bernice Ohler, leaving the crime scene with \$11.

- Reporter Tom LoBianco contributed to this report.

Baltimore Sun

Death penalty repeal sought

O'Malley backs bills to replace executions with life without parole

By Jennifer Skalka

January 26, 2007

Gov. Martin O'Malley said yesterday that he would sign a repeal of the death penalty if a bill reaches his desk, weighing in on the contentious issue hours after a coalition of legislators and activists renewed their push to strike Maryland's execution law from the books.

"Now that it's salient, and we have to deal with it, I'm certainly not going to try to duck or hide. I would like to see us repeal the death penalty," O'Malley said during an interview in his State House office. "I think the dollars could go to better use and could be invested in things that actually save lives. I don't believe the death penalty saves lives."

Democratic lawmakers introduced a new legislative proposal yesterday that would replace the death penalty with life without the possibility of parole for the most violent criminals. Sponsored by Sen. Lisa A. Gladden and Del. Samuel I. Rosenberg, both Baltimore Democrats, the bills come on the heels of a Maryland Court of Appeals ruling in December that halted executions until lawmakers develop appropriate oversight for the administration of lethal injections.

Five convicted murderers have been executed in Maryland since 1978, including two under warrants signed by former Republican Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., a death penalty supporter who left office this month.

But with a new Democratic governor and growing national worry about how the punishment is administered and whether race is a factor, the sponsors said the time is right to rekindle a serious debate in Annapolis.

Joined yesterday by activists, including Kirk Bloodsworth, who in 1993 became the first death-row inmate in the country to be exonerated through the use of DNA evidence, they said they are working on the votes needed to get the bills out of committee.

Gladden said the bills present an opportunity for Maryland to make a statement "to our nation of who we are as a people."

"I felt that we are now at a sea change and that our communities are now speaking loudly and clearly about making sure that innocent people, perhaps, are not put to death," said Gladden, a public defender in Baltimore. "One mistake is too much."

O'Malley said he would lobby for the repeal bills, although he did not include such a measure in the legislative agenda he released this week. "There are good people who have strong feelings on both sides of that issue," he said.

Still, he expressed skepticism that a majority of the House of Delegates or the Senate will support the bills.

"I'm not overly optimistic that they will, but there's a lot of new members, and perhaps given the problems, what went on in Florida, given all of the other issues having to do with the way that it's applied, maybe there is the will to do it," the governor said. Executions in Florida were halted last month amid concerns over the way lethal injections were administered.

The December Court of Appeals ruling imposed a de facto moratorium on executions in Maryland.

Ruling unanimously in an appeal by death-row inmate Vernon L. Evans, the court determined that procedures for administering lethal injections should be considered regulations and therefore reviewed by a committee of state senators and delegates. The moratorium will stand until legislators pass a law that either exempts the procedures from review or addresses the court's regulatory concerns. Or, lawmakers could do nothing, leaving the moratorium in place.

Former Gov. Parris N. Glendening imposed a moratorium in 2002 so racial disparity and other issues could be studied, but that ban was lifted under Ehrlich, his successor. Six people sit on the state's death row; four are black, two are white.

Nationally, 38 states have the death penalty, while 12 do not, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. But five of the 38 states - Kansas, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York and South Dakota - have not executed an inmate since 1976.

Baltimore County State's Attorney Scott D. Shellenberger said the death penalty plays a vital role in Maryland's criminal justice system.

"Maryland already has life without parole, and we've also had the death penalty, and I'm still very much in favor of the death penalty," he said. "I still think it acts as a deterrent. Certainly a deterrent of one [person], and that is the person that receives the death penalty [and] will never kill again."

Sen. Nancy Jacobs, a Harford County Republican and death penalty supporter, said victims of violent crime and their families deserve justice.

"I have more sympathy for the victims of crimes than I do for the perpetrators," Jacobs said. "I think people on both sides of the issue need to go to a family whose loved ones were tortured and killed and tell them the criminal deserves to live."

But death penalty opponents, gathered in Annapolis for a news conference yesterday, said the punishment disproportionately affects African-Americans. Rosenberg argued that the death penalty is not a proven deterrent to crime and that "there are compelling moral reasons to abandon it." He said the state-sanctioned killing of an innocent person is "virtually inevitable."

"The death penalty is broken beyond repair in Maryland, and across the country we cannot fix it in a way that is equitable," he said.

Lawmakers were joined by longtime activists and members of the clergy who are backing their cause. Rosenberg noted that several religious institutions support repeal, including Associated Catholic Charities; the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland; the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington; and the United Methodist Church and the Presbytery of Baltimore.

Two former death-row inmates - both wrongfully convicted - told their stories yesterday. One was Bloodsworth, a former Marine with no criminal record who served nine years in prison for the murder and rape of a 9-year-old girl. He spent two of those years on death row, but was serving a life sentence when DNA evidence cleared him. Bloodsworth's death sentence was overturned by the Court of Appeals.

"I am living proof that the criminal justice system makes serious mistakes," said Bloodsworth, who has become a national advocate for abolishing the death penalty and an author. " ... I was wrongly convicted and sentenced to death, and I've got one thing to say on that issue, that if it can happen to me it can happen to anybody in this room and anybody in the state of Maryland."

Washington Post
O'Malley Voices Support of Bill to End Death Penalty
Though Hurdles Loom, Sponsor Expresses Hope
By Ovetta Wiggins and John Wagner
January 26, 2007

Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) said yesterday that he plans to work for the repeal of Maryland's death penalty this legislative session. But he and some lawmakers predict that the measure has tough hurdles to clear before it gets to his desk.

"I've had a pretty consistent position on this," O'Malley told reporters at the State House. "Now that it's salient, I'm certainly not going to try to duck or hide. I would like to see us repeal the death penalty."

O'Malley's comments came in response to an announcement by two lawmakers that they would introduce legislation to abolish the death penalty and replace it with a sanction of life in prison without the possibility of parole. The bills were filed yesterday.

Lisa A. Gladden (D-Baltimore), the lead sponsor in the Senate, said that by her count, the measure was one vote shy of getting out of the judicial proceedings committee.

"I don't think it's totally out of the question that we could pass a repeal bill this year," said Gladden, a public defender, who has introduced similar measures in the past. "I think other legislators don't want blood on their hands."

Gladden was emboldened yesterday by the group of lawmakers, religious leaders and supporters who joined her and Del. Samuel I. Rosenberg (D-Baltimore) at a news conference about the legislation.

The issue has gained prominence in the wake of a court ruling last month that halted executions in Maryland until new regulations on lethal injection are put forward by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. O'Malley said that the process will not start before the conclusion of the legislature's debate on the death penalty bill. "That debate needs to happen," O'Malley told reporters.

Senate President Thomas Mike V. Miller Jr. (D-Calvert) said he supports the death penalty but thinks there needs to be a "healthy debate" on the subject. He said he would not influence a vote one way or the other.

"I realize the trend is against the death penalty," Miller said, "but I think there are some crimes so atrocious that it's warranted."

House Speaker Michael E. Busch (D-Anne Arundel) said he doesn't "have a real strong feeling one way or the other. We'll let the legislative process take place. . . . We've never tried to influence our colleagues on two issues: the death penalty and abortion." The bill is likely to meet resistance, with some Democrats joining minority Republicans in opposition.

Del. Dereck E. Davis (D-Prince George's) said he could not support a repeal because he had a gun held to his head three years ago.

Anthony J. O'Donnell (R-Calvert), the House minority leader, said he would not support a repeal and said he is certain that many share his position, across party lines. "We need the death penalty for the most heinous cases," he said.

Gladden and Rosenberg said they expected support from O'Malley, who has consistently said he opposes the death penalty. But O'Malley also has said that his views would not prevent him from following the law and signing death warrants.

O'Malley rarely mentioned the death penalty in his primary campaign against then-Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D) or in the general election race against Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R).

O'Malley has argued that the death penalty is not a deterrent and that money spent on prosecuting death penalty cases could be better spent fighting violent crime. Rosenberg said that a sentence of life without the possibility of parole would be an "enormous deterrent" to committing murder.

"The time and effort litigating these cases, that goes into legislating this issue, could be spent on preventative measures that make each and every citizen more safe in their home," Rosenberg said.

The death penalty repeal was not part of the 13-bill legislative agenda that O'Malley issued this week.

"There are good people who have strong feelings on both sides of the issue," he said.

The Examiner
O'Malley says he would abolish death penalty
By Len Lazarick
Jan 26, 2007

Annapolis - Gov. Martin O'Malley said Thursday he "sure would" sign a bill abolishing the death penalty in favor of life without parole, but co-sponsors of the bill said they are still rounding up votes.

"We're not there yet," said Sen. Lisa Gladden, lead sponsor and vice chair of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, which will consider the bill being introduced today. "We have five votes" in the committee, but "we need six," Gladden said.

"We're counting," said Del. Samuel Sandy Rosenberg, chief House sponsor and vice chair of the Judiciary Committee, which will take up the measure.

Thirteen senators have signed on to the bill, as have 38 delegates, and several mainstream religious organizations are backing the cause, including those representing Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, Jews, Presbyterians, Lutherans and the United Church of Christ.

“I felt we are now at a sea change,” said Gladden, a public defender. One mistake killing an innocent person is “too much.”

“I think other legislators don’t want blood on their hands,” Gladden said.

“The death penalty is broken beyond repair,” Rosenberg said.

The Court of Appeals has stayed the execution of Vernon Evans Jr. until state officials can review execution procedures.

Kirk Bloodsworth has a personal stake in the outcome of the bill.

“I’m living proof that the criminal justice system makes serious mistakes,” Bloodsworth said at a news conference in support of the bill.

In 1985, he was convicted of the rape and murder of a 9-year-old girl and sentenced to death. But in 1993, DNA testing cleared him of the killing. He was the first American on death row exonerated by DNA evidence.

He said he is now one of 123 people in the U.S. who had been wrongfully convicted and exonerated.

A poll in 2005 for the Maryland Catholic Conference shows 56 percent of Marylanders support the death penalty, but an even larger number — 63 percent — said the sentence of life without the possibility of parole is an acceptable substitute.

In a brief interview, O’Malley told reporters: “We waste a lot of money pursuing a policy that doesn’t work to reduce crime or save lives. We could be putting that money into crime reduction.”

Herald Mail

Gov. O'Malley backs death penalty repeal

By Andrew Schotz

January 26, 2007

ANNAPOLIS - Gov. Martin O'Malley said Thursday that he'd sign a bill repealing Maryland's death penalty, a bill that sponsors plan to introduce by this morning's session.

"Yeah, I sure would," O'Malley said during a State House interview. "We're wasting a lot of money pursuing a policy that doesn't work to reduce crime or to save lives when we

could be putting that money into crime reduction. I'm much more in favor of life without parole."

The lead sponsors - Sen. Lisa A. Gladden and Del. Samuel I. "Sandy" Rosenberg, both Baltimore City Democrats - on Thursday called the death penalty an unreliable, expensive, biased and immoral form of punishment.

"It doesn't work," said Gladden, a public defender whose recent repeal bills have failed. "The system's broken."

Gladden wondered if a new governor could help bring a different result. Former Gov. Robert Ehrlich, a Republican, supported the death penalty.

Life without parole would replace the death penalty in the proposed bill.

A repeal bill must pass through the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, which includes Sen. Alex X. Mooney, R-Frederick/Washington, and the House Judiciary Committee, which includes Del. Christopher B. Shank, R-Washington.

Shank predicted the bill will pass in his committee but face strong resistance on the House floor. He said he steadfastly supports the death penalty when it's appropriate, which is rare.

He mentioned the killing of two state correctional officers in 2006.

One was Jeffery Alan Wroten, a Roxbury Correctional Institution officer shot and killed, allegedly by an inmate he was guarding at Washington County Hospital.

The inmate, Brandon Morris, is scheduled to be tried on murder charges in Howard County on June 4. He faces the death penalty if convicted.

"I think in circumstances like that, circumstances where there are other aggravating circumstances, the death penalty still has a role in the state of Maryland," Shank said.

"I am certainly convinced that those who are currently awaiting execution on Maryland's death row as we speak ... I think there's no doubt, whatsoever, about their guilt," he said.

At their bill announcement, Gladden and Rosenberg were joined by two men whose convictions and death sentences in Maryland were overturned.

Kirk Bloodsworth was convicted in Baltimore County of raping and killing a 9-year-old girl and sentenced to death in 1985. He was released in 1993 after DNA evidence acquitted him.

Walter Lomax was convicted of murder and robbery in Baltimore City in 1967. His 39 years in Maryland prisons included a brief stay at Maryland Correctional Institution-Hagerstown. He was proven innocent and released last December.

"Just imagine how many innocent people may have been put to death," Lomax said.

Maryland is one of 38 states with a death penalty.

It has executed five people since 1976 and had eight people on death row as of Oct. 1, 2006, according to the nonprofit Death Penalty Information Center.

Delmarva Daily Times

Bill seeks to abolish death penalty

Shore lawmakers mostly support capital punishment

By Joseph Gidjunis

January 26, 2007

ANNAPOLIS -- State Senate and House lawmakers introduced legislation Thursday to permanently repeal the death penalty in Maryland. Despite this announcement, a majority of the Eastern Shore delegation adamantly supports capital punishment.

Sen. Lisa Gladden, D-41-Baltimore, and Delegate Samuel Rosenberg, D-41-Baltimore, surrounded by death penalty opponents, clergy and fellow legislators, said the momentum to repeal capital punishment is growing, and it's time for the representatives of the state to act. Rosenberg added that he believes Democratic Gov. Martin O'Malley would support the legislation because he has publicly and privately said he is against capital punishment.

"I don't think any legislator wants blood on their hands if we put to death an innocent person," Gladden said. "Murder rates are up in every county in Maryland. ... It doesn't deter murder. It doesn't work."

Death penalty abolishment bills have been submitted in nearly every General Assembly session in the past two decades, but anti-capital punishment proponents said they have more public support due to a recent court decision that has created a de facto death to state executions.

In December, a Maryland Appeals court effectively placed a moratorium on the death penalty because of a technicality when state officials failed to undergo the proper public hearing process on the methods for implementing capital punishment. The death penalty has been used six times in Maryland since 1976.

Adding to the support for a repeal was Kirk Bloodsworth, a Dorchester County man who was wrongfully convicted of raping and murdering a 9-year-old girl in the 1980s. Since being the first person to be cleared by DNA evidence, he has lobbied federal and state legislators to oppose putting anyone to death. He relayed the drama of his near-death experience and jail time to the state officials and the media.

"The criminal justice system makes mistakes," he said. "I was wrongly sentenced to death. If it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone in this room."

An "Amen" was heard from the small crowd who came to listen. Bloodsworth added that he was wrongly convicted with a record of being an honorably discharged Marine who had a clean criminal background.

Despite this case, seven out of the eight legislators who represent the Eastern Shore support the continued use of the death penalty.

Only Delegate Rudy Cane, D-37B-Wicomico, stood with Gladden and Rosenberg Thursday.

"I wouldn't be devoting myself and my time to this issue if I wasn't for it," Cane said. "I've been thinking about this all of my life, and I'm against it."

The other seven representatives strongly oppose any appeal of the death penalty, but none more than Sen. Rich Colburn, R-37-Dorchester, who is ready to fight any repeal on the Senate floor.

"It will have a very difficult time passing the Senate," said Colburn, who suspected a vote could lead to a filibuster to delay action.

He added that this could become legislation that divides the entire state because of the political leanings at the issue's core.

"This is essentially a liberal-versus-conservative issue," Colburn said. "The liberal philosophy to me is being soft on crime, soft on the criminals. They believe in rehabilitation of the criminal. ... A lot of people on the Eastern Shore say if you live by the sword, you die by the sword."

Colburn emphasizes that the death penalty is only used in aggravated situations such as rape with murder or killing a police officer, and he won't vote to eliminate extreme punishment when these extreme situations occur.

Delegate Adelaide "Addie" Eckardt, R-37B-Dorchester, said that because capital punishment has been used infrequently, it is proof that the system is working. Prosecutors also know that the average extra cost to try someone for death is around \$1 million. Eckardt said this price tag adds disincentive so only the most serious crimes are contemplated for capital punishment.

"I support the death penalty. I think Maryland has one of the best systems in the country," Eckardt said. "I think there are a lot of checks and balances in the process."

Sen. J. Lowell Stoltzfus, R-38-Somerset, said with technological advancements in DNA or a videotape of the crime, absolute certainty is known and removes doubt about a defendant's innocence. He would, however, like to "raise the bar" and make these tools required pieces of evidence for a death sentence.

Capital News Service/ Southern Maryland Online
Legislators Propose Death Penalty Repeal; O'Malley Says He'll Sign It
January 25, 2007
By Sharahn D. Boykin

ANNAPOLIS - The move to the death penalty in Maryland picked up momentum Thursday as legislators unveiled a bill to ban capital punishment, and Gov. Martin O'Malley said he would sign it if it passed.

"If the bill is debated in the General Assembly and members of the legislature come to a consensus, (O'Malley) would sign bill," said Rick Abbruzzese, a spokesman for the governor.

The governor has said the death penalty is not cost effective, and money spent on cases involving the death penalty could be redirected to other more effective measures.

"I would like to see us evolve to a point where we all understand that the death penalty does not deter violent crime and does not saves lives," O'Malley said in an interview Wednesday. "And in fact, we spend a whole lot of money prosecuting the death penalty when instead we could be preventing crime and saving lives by putting those dollars into other things that actually do work."

O'Malley called the death penalty "a policy that does not work and that wastes a lot of money and does not advance the dignity of the individual ... so I'd like to see us evolve to a point in time where we no longer have the death penalty in our country."

On Thursday, co-sponsors of a death penalty repeal bill, Sen. Lisa A. Gladden, D-Baltimore, vice chair of the Judicial Proceedings Committee and Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg, D-Baltimore, vice chair of the Judiciary Committee, told reporters they would shortly introduce a death penalty abolition bill and feel they have a good chance of passing it.

Gladden said she thinks the availability of the option of sentencing convicted offenders to life imprisonment with out parole will help the bill pass. This option was not available when the state's death penalty was reenacted.

"Life without parole is an option that those who may support the death penalty would choose over a death sentence," Gladden said. "So this is a very different time for us in the state of Maryland."

The challenge, Gladden said, is getting the additional votes needed in the House and the Senate. They need 24 votes in the Senate and 71 in the House.

"... We're not there yet, but I don't think it's totally out of the question that we could pass the repeal bill this year," Gladden said.

Gladden and Rosenberg also had concerns about garnering support from Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., D-Calvert, who co-sponsored the death penalty bill in 1978. Miller, who could not be reached for comment, also cast the deciding vote which prevented the reinstatement of a death penalty moratorium in 2003, according to previous news accounts.

Currently, there are eight people on Maryland's death row. Steve Oken was the last person executed in Maryland in 2004. The 42-year-old, convicted of murder charges, was executed by lethal injection.

Baltimore Sun
Key Death Penalty Dates
By Jennifer McMenamin
January 26, 2007

1972: The U.S. Supreme Court invalidates death penalty statutes across the country.

1976: U.S. Supreme Court rules that the death penalty is legal.

1978: General Assembly reinstates death penalty laws in Maryland.

1987: General Assembly adds life without the possibility of parole to the books as a sentencing option.

1994: General Assembly authorizes injection as the state's method of execution.

May 17, 1994, at 1:10 a.m.: John Frederick Thanos is executed for killing three teenagers during a weeklong crime spree in 1990.

July 2, 1997, at 12:27 a.m.: Flint Gregory Hunt is executed for gunning down a Baltimore policeman in 1985.

Nov. 16, 1998, at 10:27 p.m.: Tyrone X. Gilliam is executed for kidnapping and killing a Baltimore accountant in 1988.

May 9, 2002: Gov. Parris N. Glendening imposes a moratorium on the death penalty while a state-ordered University of Maryland study of capital punishment is conducted. The study would conclude there are racial and geographic disparities in the application of the death penalty in the state.

Jan. 15, 2003: The execution moratorium is effectively lifted when Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. is sworn in as governor.

June 17, 2004, at 9:18 p.m.: Steven Howard Oken is executed for the rape and murder of a White Marsh newlywed at the start of a crime spree in 1987 that included the killings of two other women.

Dec. 5, 2005 at 9:18 p.m.: Wesley Eugene Baker is executed for killing a Baltimore County elementary school teacher's aide in front of her grandchildren in a 1991 robbery.

Dec. 19, 2006: Maryland Court of Appeals rules that executions cannot continue in Maryland until the legislature approves regulations for lethal injection procedures, or passes a law saying that such rules are not required.

Jan. 17, 2007: Gov. Martin O'Malley, a death penalty opponent, succeeds Ehrlich in office.

Catholic Online
Abolish death penalty, state Catholic conference says,
supporting proposed legislation
January 25, 2007

ANNAPOLIS, Md.— The death penalty in Maryland should be repealed as the only way to prevent “zealous prosecutors” from resorting to the taking of life to protect society, said the head of the state’s Catholic conference.

In a Jan. 25 statement, Richard J. Dowling, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, supported the introduction of legislation on that day abolishing capital punishment in the state.

Under the proposal by Sen. Lisa Gladden, vice chair of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, and House Del. Samuel Rosenberg, vice chair of the Judiciary Committee, the death penalty would be replaced with life without parole.

The repeal legislation follows just weeks after a Maryland Court of Appeals decision to halt the use of lethal injection in executions until acceptable procedures are developed with oversight by the state attorney general's office, the legislature and comment by the general public.

In addition to problems with the lethal injection protocol, a University of Maryland study released in 2003 found discrimination among those sent to death row with the murder of a white person being twice as likely to result in a death sentence as the murder of a black person.

Dowling noted that 20 years ago the statute allowing Maryland courts to imprison those convicted of murder to a life sentence without the possibility of parole was passed.

At that time, he said, “most state lawmakers viewed the sentence as an acceptable alternative to the death penalty,” noting that the Maryland Catholic Conference agreed and supported the legislation.

“But the sad fact is that we still have executions in Maryland, and, if zealous prosecutors have their way, we’ll continue to have them,” Dowling said in the statement. “It’s clear that only repeal can change that.”

Noting that almost two thirds of the state’s residents supported life without parole as an acceptable alternative to death by execution in a poll two years ago and recent discussion about “mistakes and biases that beset death-penalty processes and proceedings here and around the country,” the executive director said that “support for repeal cannot have diminished. If anything, it’s picked up steam.”

He pointed to Catholic Church leadership in the state, within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Vatican promoting abolition of the death penalty.

“For when all the legalistic arguments are offered and addressed, the fundamental moral question remains: Are we permitted to take the life of another human being? The teachings of our faith tell us that when other punishment options are available, options like life-without-parole sentences that protect society by rendering offenders incapable of doing further harm, then we should not resort to killing,” he said.

“We should not resort to killing, not even in the case of one who takes the life of another,” he said.

"There is a growing groundswell of support around death penalty repeal, both in Maryland and nationally," said Jane Henderson, executive director of MD Citizens Against State Executions. "An overwhelming majority of Marylanders support replacing executions with life without parole and we now have a governor who personally agrees that capital punishment is a failure."

"From persistent racial discrimination to faulty evidence to innocent convictions, the social, political and economic costs are too high to continue the use of capital punishment," Henderson added. "The time for repeal is now."

TELEVISION

WBAL 11 Baltimore

WJLA 13 ABC Washington, D.C.

WMDT ABC Delmarva

NBC4

Measure Would Repeal Death Penalty; O'Malley Would Sign

January 25, 2007

Lawmakers announced plans Thursday to introduce legislation that would repeal the death penalty in Maryland.

The measure would replace the state's death penalty with a prison sentence of life without parole.

Governor Martin O'Malley says he'd sign the measure into law, if it passes the House and Senate. O'Malley says he believes the state wastes a lot of money pursuing a policy that, "doesn't work to reduce crime or save lives."

State Senator Lisa Gladden and Delegate Samuel Rosenberg say they plan to submit measures either late Thursday or Friday.

Last month, the state's highest court ruled that executions in Maryland can't go forward until a legislative committee reviews Maryland's lethal injection protocol.

Senate Republican Leader David Brinkley, who supports the death penalty, says he doesn't think the legislative review will take place this session, because lawmakers want to focus on budget issues.

WMDT Delmarva

MD Questions Death Penalty

By Danya Bacchus

What should happen to the very worst criminals...the baddest of the bad? Should they sit in a prison cell until they die, or should states speed up the process? Maryland technically is a death penalty state. But that could soon change.

"The death penalty is broken beyond repair in Maryland and across the country."

Standing in front of a diverse group of supporters, Maryland Senator Lisa Gladden and Delegate Sam Rosenberg introduced legislation Thursday that would put an end to the death penalty. And replace it with a prison sentence of life without parole.

Rosenberg adds "under our bill the state's most dangerous murderers would be behind bars for the rest of their lives."

Walter Lomax knows all about spending time in prison. In 1967, he was wrongfully convicted of a murder robbery and faced the death penalty. Instead, he received life in prison. A sentence that ultimately saved his life.

"If I'm totally innocent and have been incarcerated for 39 years how many people may have been executed as a result of wrong convictions?"

"This is just the first step for death penalty repeal legislation. It has to get out of committee, then go through the house and senate before it makes it to Governor O'Malley's desk."

Governor O'Malley hasn't said specifically if he would veto or sign such a bill. But in the past, he has said he opposes the death penalty.

Since 1976, Maryland's only executed 5 inmates, all by lethal injection.

WJZ-13 Baltimore
Maryland Lawmakers Call For End To Death Penalty
By Mike Hellgren

(WJZ/AP) Two state lawmakers want to see Maryland abolish the death penalty, and they've proposed a bill that would do just that.

As WJZ's Mike Hellgren reports, Senator Lisa Gladden and Delegate Samuel Rosenberg introduced bills Thursday which would abolish capital punishment in Maryland.

Under Gladden and Rosenberg's proposal, the death penalty would be replaced with life without parole.

The death penalty repeal legislation follows just weeks after a Maryland Court of Appeals decision to halt the use of lethal injection in executions until acceptable procedures are developed with oversight by the Attorney General's office, the legislature, and comment by the general public.

Given the costs around changing these protocols, some have recommended to instead repeal the death penalty all together.

"There is a growing groundswell of support around death penalty repeal, both in Maryland and nationally," said Jane Henderson, executive director of MD Citizens Against State Executions. "An overwhelming majority of Marylanders support replacing executions with life without parole and we now have a governor who personally agrees that capital punishment is a failure."

Proponents of the death penalty disagree. They think violent criminals and killers should be subject to the same fate they handed their victims.

Fred Romano's sister was killed Steven Oaken--one of the last convicts to be executed in Maryland. Last month, Romano commented on the case of Vernon Evans, whose case is at the center of the recent freeze on Maryland executions.

"All their saying is 'Vernon Evans you get a needle in your arm and go to sleep.' If that's all you've got to do to pay for your crime, you shouldn't complain," said Romano.

Other issues in play in the death penalty debate include racial bias. A University of Maryland study released in 2003 found discrimination among those sent to death row with the murder of a white person being twice as likely to result in a death sentence as the murder of an african-american person.

Further discrimination was found regarding the location of a crime and the punishment received. If a murder is committed in suburban Baltimore County, the study found that there is a 13 times greater chance of the county pursuing the death penalty than if the crime was committed just across the line in Baltimore city.

Until lawmakers act on the issue of capital punishment in Maryland, no death sentences can be carried out statewide. There are currently six inmates sitting on Maryland's death row.