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January 10, 2008

To: The Honorable John Van De Kamp, Chair, California Commission on the
Fair Administration of Justice, and Members of the Commission

From: Janis R. Hirohama, President

CC: Gerald F. Uelmen, Executive Director

Re: Administration of the Death Penalty in California

The League of Women Voters of California commends the California
Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice for its current investigation of
how the death penalty is administered in California. We look forward to seeing
your recommendations.

The League of Women Voters supports the abolition of the death penalty. While
we believe that the death penalty is inherently flawed and that no amount of
reform can make it an appropriate sentencing option, we welcome actions that
might mitigate some of its flaws as steps toward its abolition.

We expect that your investigation will confirm that the death penalty is applied
unfairly in California. Research shows that use of the death penalty varies
significantly within the state, depending on the race or ethnicity of the victim, the
county of prosecution, and the diversity of the community.

The growing number of wrongful convictions that have been discovered lends
further urgency to the need to consider alternatives to the death penalty. Concerns
about wrongful convictions helped lead to a moratorium on executions in Illinois
and to abolition of the death penalty in New Jersey.

Particularly in light of the data showing that use of the death penalty has no
deterrent effect, we believe that scarce public safety funds would be better used
for solving crimes and for violence prevention programs, rather than on
exhaustive post-conviction appeals and carrying out executions.

There is an alternative to using the death penalty—imprisonment without the
possibility of parole. We hope your recommendations to the legislature will
promote use of this alternative.

Presented at the public hearing of the California Commission on the Fair
Administration of Justice by Barbara Hopkins