



NEW JERSEY SENATE

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COMMITTEES:
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February 13, 2008

California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice
Attn: John Van de Kamp, Chair
900 Lafayette Street, Suite 608
Santa Clara, California 95050

Dear John Van De Kamp and Members of the Commission,

Why did so many people feel elated when New Jersey's Senate and Assembly passed and Governor Corzine signed legislation I sponsored replacing the death penalty with life without parole?

It certainly wasn't because of any compassion for those on death row.

At the bill signing, the governor's office was overflowing with opponents of the death penalty, each with his or her own reasons for feeling good because of its repeal.

Family members of murder victims were grateful that the long drawn out process of appeals, required to reduce the chance of executing an innocent person, would be replaced by the certainty of life imprisonment without parole and they would be able to grieve their loss in private, on the timetable of their choosing, without the intrusion of the possibility of an execution being publicly dangled in front of them.

Clergy of many faiths were filled with love, not for the murderers whose lives would be spared, but for a society that didn't need to take a life to do justice.

Exonerees were grateful that no one from New Jersey would have to stand in their shoes waiting to be put to death for a murder they did not commit.

Law enforcement officials were grateful that the extraordinary resources needed to investigate, try and then defend appeals in death penalty cases could be better put to use fighting gangs, gun runners and drug dealers.

As the state that suffered the 2nd most fatalities in the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, Legislators, Democrat and Republican, decided that the death penalty was not the best way to respond to terrorism. It only heightens the notoriety of the terrorists. This is not a question of whether the crimes committed are heinous enough to merit the most severe punishment. They are. But the international war tribunals in Bosnia and Rwanda, and the United Nations itself, have all rejected the use of the death penalty, even when responding to terrorism. The death penalty would put the U.S. in an isolated position, which may even serve the terrorists' interests.

New Jersey was pleased to be joining most of the free world, countries like Israel, the Vatican, Italy, France and Germany, which do not have a death penalty and departing company from countries like Iraq, Iran, North Korea and Libya which do.

On December 17, 2007, New Jersey became the first state in the nation, since the 1976 Supreme Court ruling granted states the authority to enact death penalty statutes, to repeal its death penalty.

The road to abolition started in New Jersey, but it will not end until it goes through our nation's capitol and the 37 states that still have a death penalty.

If California legislators and its governor listen to the voices of families of murder victims, clergy of all faiths, law enforcement officials, and their own conscience, the road will become a lot shorter. A beacon of light will shine from West to East Coast and around the globe, much like when the Roman Coliseum was lit up in honor of New Jersey's repeal, in recognition that governments should not be deciding who should live and who should die and that justice is better served by replacing the death penalty with life without parole.

Sincerely,



Senator Raymond J. Lesniak *RL*
New Jersey State Senate
20th Legislative District

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