

# DEATH PENALTY FOCUS

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## **HISTORIC DEATH PENALTY VOTE IN NEW JERSEY REFLECTS GROWING NATIONAL SHIFT AWAY FROM CAPITAL PUNISHMENT** *New Jersey Legislature is the First to Abolish Death Penalty in Over 30 Years*

On Thursday, December 13th, the New Jersey Assembly voted 44-36 to replace the state's death penalty with the sentence of life without parole. Earlier this week, the Senate also voted in favor of abolition. New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine is expected to sign the bill. There has not been a similar vote since 1965, when legislatures in Iowa and West Virginia both voted to end capital punishment.

This historic vote in New Jersey is the clearest signal yet that the public is moving away from capital punishment.

- New York's death penalty law was declared unconstitutional in 2004. Since then, the last person has been removed from death row and the legislature has repeatedly rejected all attempts to reinstate capital punishment.
- Illinois is in the eighth year of a death penalty moratorium, which was established in 2000 due to concerns about wrongful convictions.
- Death sentences in the United States have dropped by 60% since 1999. Even in Texas, death sentences have dropped significantly during the past decade.
- Executions around the country are on hold as the U.S. Supreme Court prepares to hear a case regarding the constitutionality of Kentucky's lethal injection procedure.
- Legislative studies of the death penalty are underway in California, North Carolina, and Tennessee.
- Public opinion polls show that life without parole is steadily replacing the death penalty as the preferred punishment for murder.

Lance Lindsey, Executive Director of Death Penalty Focus, said of today's vote, "The decision by the New Jersey Legislature to abolish the death penalty is commendable. It represents a growing understanding that the death penalty experiment in this country has failed. The death penalty is a waste of precious public safety resources; resources that could be better spent on effective crime prevention programs and services for victims. I hope this decision will inspire other states to abandon capital punishment."

For more information on the New Jersey abolition bill, please contact Celeste Fitzgerald, Director of New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, at (973) 635-6396 or cell (973) 495-5302.

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