

P R E S S R E L E A S E

For Immediate Release
December 18, 2009

Contact: Stefanie Faucher, 415-243-1043 or Stefanie@deathpenalty.org

Death Sentences Reach Their Lowest Point Since 1976

California Bucks the National Trend with Nearly 50% Increase in New Death Sentences

The national death penalty research organization Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) released their year-end report today. The report revealed that in 2009, new death sentences nationally reached their lowest levels since in 1976, the year the death penalty was reinstated by the U.S. Supreme Court. However, in California the number of new death sentences reached 29, an almost 50% increase over the last few years. The vast majority of those death verdicts, however, came from just three counties (Los Angeles, Riverside and Orange).

The number of executions carried out in 2009 also remained very low compared to past years; 52 this year as opposed to 98 in 1999. Executions occurred in just 11 states, with the vast majority occurring in Texas (24 out of the 52). Executions have been on hold in California for nearly four years due to challenges regarding how the state adopted its execution protocols.

The number of states retaining capital punishment dropped to 35 this year, New Mexico being the most recent to replace the death penalty with permanent imprisonment. Furthermore 11 states, including Colorado, Connecticut and Maryland, advanced legislative bills to eliminate the death penalty due to its high costs and the risk of wrongful execution.

In addition, the report found that nine individuals had been released from death row in 2009 after having been found wrongfully convicted, more than double the number discovered in 2008.

A public opinion poll conducted earlier this year found that **Californians overwhelmingly preferred a sentence of permanent imprisonment to the death penalty: 60% to 40%**. When you add in the requirement that prisoners work and pay restitution, support for the death penalty plummets to just 26% while support for the alternative is more than 64% (Survey Research Center of the University of Virginia, 2009).

Lance Lindsey, Executive Director of Death Penalty Focus, said this of the developments, "What has been glaringly apparent is that the public no longer believes the death penalty increases public safety. With our state and local governments facing drastic budget shortfalls, it is time for us to reassess this failed policy and put the hundreds of millions of dollars we waste on capital punishment each year to better use."

Death Penalty Focus is a national non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about the death penalty and its alternatives. Founded in 1988, the organization is based in San Francisco. For more information, visit: www.deathpenalty.org. To read the full report released by DPIC, visit: www.deathpenaltyinfo.org.

###