

Dec-17-07 Governor Corzine Signs Legislation Eliminating Death Penalty in New Jersey

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NEWS RELEASE

Governor Jon S. Corzine
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GOVERNOR CORZINE SIGNS LEGISLATION ELIMINATING DEATH PENALTY IN NEW JERSEY

TRENTON - Governor Jon S. Corzine today signed legislation abolishing the death penalty in New Jersey and replacing it with life imprisonment without parole. New Jersey is the first state in the nation to enact a law to end use of the death penalty since it was reinstated by the United States Supreme Court in 1976. To ensure that the intent of the legislation was fully carried out as to the eight remaining inmates on death row, on Sunday evening Governor Corzine commuted the sentences of those inmates to life in prison without parole.

"Today New Jersey evolves. This is a day of progress for us and for the millions of people across our nation and around the globe who reject the death penalty as a moral or practical response to the grievous, even heinous, crime of murder," Corzine said. "I have been moved by the passionate views on both sides of this issue, and I firmly believe that replacing the death penalty with life in prison without parole best captures our State's highest values and reflects our best efforts to search for true justice."

"We can't logically argue the deterrent factor of the death penalty when, in fact, we never use it," said Senate President Richard J. Codey (D-Essex). "The best thing we can do for the residents of New Jersey is to enact a measure that will speak to the truth of what the real sentence is and help victim's families put this painful chapter in their life behind them more quickly,"

"New Jersey's death penalty has been nothing more than a paper deterrent, the epitome of false security," said Speaker Joe Roberts (D-Camden). "When Sister Helen Prejean visited the State House last month, she said that by abolishing the death penalty New Jersey would become 'a beacon on a hill.' At the least, we have set an example for other states to follow."

"I can't imagine how I would react if I had a loved one murdered. Hopefully, my faith would guide me as it has guided the families of murder victims who have supported repeal of the death penalty," said Senator Raymond J. Lesniak (D-Union). "It's not often we vote our conscience in the legislature. We should do it more often."

"Our death penalty has been cruel and unusual punishment both for the criminals on death row and the families of the victims," said Assemblyman Wilfredo Caraballo (D-Essex/Union). "We have seized the moment and now join the ranks of other states and countries that view the death penalty as discriminatory, immoral, and barbaric. We're a better state than one that puts people to death."

The legislation (S171/A3716) was sponsored in the Senate by Senator Raymond J. Lesniak (D-Union), Senator Robert J. Martin (R-Morris/Passaic), Senator Shirley K. Turner (D-Mercer) and Senator Nia H. Gill (D-Essex/Passaic). It was sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblyman Wilfredo Caraballo (D-Essex/Union), Assemblyman Christopher Bateman (R-Morris/Somerset), Assemblyman Gordon M. Johnson (D-Bergen), Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttel (D-Bergen) and Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz-Perez (D-Camden/Gloucester).