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LDF Statement on California’s Moratorium on the Death Penalty

California Governor Gavin Newsom is about to sign an executive order today imposing a moratorium on the death penalty in the state and closing the execution chamber at San Quentin State Prison. With this move, California joins Oregon, Colorado, and Pennsylvania as states that have used executive power to halt capital punishment.

“Governor Newsom’s imposition of a moratorium on the death penalty is a bold and important step towards confronting the truth about capital punishment in the United States. We have long known that capital punishment in California—as well as across the nation—is infected with racial bias and administered arbitrarily without the deterrent effects claimed by its proponents,” said [Sherrilyn Ifill](#), President and Director-Counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF). “Since the founding of LDF almost 80 years ago, LDF has continuously challenged capital punishment as the most egregious injustice against Black people in the criminal justice system. Through our litigation and advocacy, we have demonstrated that the death penalty makes a mockery of our system of justice, dehumanizing and devaluing countless lives. Our nation has tinkered with the machinery of death for far too long, and we encourage states to continue to ban capital punishment outright or to impose moratoriums when a ban is not possible.”

As of the [Spring 2017](#), California had 744 people on death row and was one of 33 states with death penalty statutes. The stark racial disparities in California’s death penalty system, which are greater than nationwide statistics, are a product of racial biases that pervade all stages of capital cases: Black individuals make up 36 percent of California’s death row despite comprising only 6.5 percent of the statewide population. As people of color in California face growing racial inequities in education, housing, employment, and environmental issues, the state has spent nearly \$5 billion to house, prosecute, and eventually execute 13 death row inmates over the past four decades. The benefits that could accrue from an alternative use of these resources are incalculable. In announcing the moratorium, Gov. Newsom [highlighted](#) that capital punishment, “is inconsistent with our bedrock values and strikes at the very heart of what it means to be a Californian.”

Over the course of LDF’s nearly 80-year history, the organization has consistently opposed the death penalty and challenged its constitutionality. In LDF’s early years, Thurgood Marshall traversed the country representing Black Americans, including those on death row in places like [Groveland, Florida](#). In 1972, LDF won *Furman v. Georgia*, which instituted a brief moratorium on capital punishment throughout the United States. Since

Furman, LDF has continued its unparalleled legacy of defending individuals on death row and, for decades, has published *Death Row USA* – a quarterly publication compiling the latest statistics on capital punishment across the country.

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

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