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NORTH CAROLINIANS SUPPORT TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF EXECUTIONS BY MORE THAN TWO TO ONE MARGIN

RALEIGH -- Sixty-three percent of North Carolinians support a temporary suspension of executions while the state's capital punishment system is studied, according to a major statewide public opinion poll released today by the North Carolina Coalition for a Moratorium. The State Senate passed a moratorium bill last spring and the House is considering the bill this session.

"These results clearly show that a strong majority of people in North Carolina believe our capital punishment system has serious flaws and that we need to take a time out from executions to address those problems," said Marshall Hurley, spokesperson for NCCM.

The poll was commissioned by NCCM and conducted by Doble Research Associates, a nonpartisan, national consulting firm. Doble Research Associates' clients include government agencies, states, corporations, colleges and universities, foundations, and public service organizations.

"Support for the two-year suspension of executions is widespread and cuts across all demographic groups, regions of the state and political party affiliation," said John Doble, the founder of the firm. "This is clearly an issue that resonates with the people in North Carolina."

The poll found that North Carolinians support a moratorium on executions in North Carolina by a margin of more than two to one, with 63% in favor and 28% opposed. Support is strong among men and women, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, death penalty supporters and opponents, and people of all education levels.

"Most voters will not change their mind about a legislator based on how he or she votes on the suspension of executions," Doble said. The voters who say it will matter are more likely to support a lawmaker who favors the pause in executions."

Fifty-nine percent of those polled said it would make no difference in their vote if a candidate for the legislature supported the moratorium bill. Twenty-four percent said they would be more likely to support a candidate who favored a suspension of executions, while 12% said they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supported a moratorium.

Seventy-one percent of those polled said that North Carolina definitely or probably has freed someone from death row in the last 20 years because he was innocent. Fifty-six percent said that North Carolina definitely or probably has executed an innocent person in the last 20 years.

A majority of citizens favors the death penalty. Fifty-nine percent polled said they support the death penalty, while 27% said they oppose it.

Only 47% of those polled said they believed “life without parole” means life. In 1994 a law was enacted in North Carolina making life without the possibility of parole the only alternative to a death sentence for capital murder.

When given the option of true life without parole, respondents’ support for the death penalty dropped to 33%, with 43% favoring a life sentence. When given the option of life without parole and the offender working in prison to pay restitution to the victim’s family, support for the death penalty dropped even further, to 26%, with support for a life sentence plus restitution at 64%.

The poll was a telephone survey of 818 randomly sampled adult residents of North Carolina. The calls were made between April 13 and April 21, 2004. The margin of error is 3.4%.

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