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## **ATTY GROUP'S PLEA TO GOV. RELL: ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY**

HARTFORD, May 28, 2009 – After spending 12 years on death row, and a total of 17 years behind bars, Randy Steidl is a living example of the miscarriage of justice: Steidl was wrongfully convicted of a double murder in Illinois in 1986 and was exonerated in 2004.

Steidl today joined lawyers from across the state at a news conference at the state legislature calling on Gov. Rell to end capital punishment in Connecticut.

“Randy Steidl is proof that innocent people are sentenced to death,” said Atty. Edward J. Gavin, President of the Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA), a group of 300 attorneys in both the public and private sectors, dedicated to defending persons accused of criminal offenses. “Since 1973, 130 prisoners on death row have been exonerated. Clearly, death penalty laws are deeply flawed. The appropriate punishment for even the most heinous of murders is life without the possibility of release.”

The group is pressing for Gov. Rell to sign Raised Bill 6578, which calls for the abolition of the death penalty in Connecticut. The bill has already passed the House and the Senate and now it is up to the governor to make it state law.

“Capital punishment is unconstitutional. It is never appropriate in that it risks the execution of the actual innocent and is morally and ethically wrong,” Gavin said. “Evidence clearly shows that the death penalty does *not* deter violent crime.”

“Capital punishment is also disproportionately applied,” Gavin continued. “Connecticut’s current death penalty law allows individual prosecutors in the state, wide discretion as to whether to charge someone with a capital crime and whether to seek the death penalty,” Gavin said. “There is no uniformity. What might not constitute a capital crime in Bridgeport may constitute a capital offense in Waterbury or Hartford. That is startlingly unfair.”

Speaking at the news conference today was prison minister Sister Helen Prejean, author of “Dead Men Walking” and a leading advocate for abolishment of the death penalty. Prejean addressed the group in a telephone conference during the event.

Atty. Jennifer Zito, Vice President, CCDLA, Atty. Michael Fitzpatrick, Past President, CCDLA, and Atty. William Dow, Past President, CCDLA, also spoke at the conference.

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“Capital punishment is an egregious waste of ever limited taxpayer dollars,” said Gavin, referring to a 2008 report by the Office of Legislative Research Analysis. “The annual cost to incarcerate a typical prison inmate in Connecticut is \$44,165. The cost to house a capital inmate in Connecticut is a remarkable \$100,385.”

Gov. Rell also was urged to repeal the state’s death penalty in a statement signed by 27 exonerated survivors of death row. “Collectively, we spent more than 250 years on death row before our exonerations,” the statement read. “No one knows how many of the 3,300 men and women currently serving death sentences across the country are also innocent. Nor does anyone know how many of the more than 1,150 human beings executed in America since 1977 were as innocent as any of us.”

“As criminal defense lawyers, we have an obligation to speak out. We have an obligation to explain why Connecticut’s death penalty law is unconstitutional and simply wrong,” Gavin said. “We cannot be silent. No one else in our state should be silent either. We call on people from throughout the state to contact Governor Rell and urge her to sign the bill to abolish the death penalty.”

*The Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA) is an organization of approximately 300 lawyers who are dedicated to defending persons accused of criminal offenses. Founded in 1988, CCDLA is Connecticut’s only statewide criminal defense lawyer’s organization. Membership is from both the public and private sectors of the criminal defense bar. CCDLA, an affiliate of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, works ensure that the individual rights guaranteed by the Connecticut and United States Constitutions are applied fairly and equally and that those rights are not diminished.*