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REPEAL FLAWED DEATH PENALTY LAW, LAWYERS URGE

CALL YOUR REPRESENTATIVES, SAYS DEFENSE LAWYERS' ASSOC.

HARTFORD, Jan. 13, 2005 – The 300 members of the Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers' Association (CCDLA) today called on the state legislature to abolish the death penalty in the state – and called on Governor Rell to stay the execution of Michael Ross pending action by the General Assembly.

CCDLA also called on Connecticut voters to contact legislators and urge them to rescind the state's capital punishment law. "It's unconstitutional," said CCDLA president, Attorney Michael A. Fitzpatrick

"The Michael Ross case has caused all of us to take a new look at whether the death penalty is appropriate in Connecticut," Fitzpatrick said. "Clearly, it is not. His pending execution gives added and extreme urgency to the need to end the death penalty in our state."

"More than a year ago, a committee created by the legislature concluded a comprehensive study of Connecticut's death penalty law," said Fitzpatrick. "None of the committee's recommendations has been adopted, despite a clear indication that the state's law is being administered in an arbitrary and discriminatory manner. That is unconstitutional."

"The 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," Fitzpatrick said. "As a result, statistics show that an individual is significantly more likely to face capital punishment in Hartford or Waterbury than in other parts of the state, even if the crimes are identical. That is startlingly unfair."

"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," Fitzpatrick. "We cannot be silent. No one else in our state should be silent either."

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“We - as lawyers and as fair-minded people - want our legislative and executive branches to know that the infliction of the death penalty in Connecticut is wrong. Its use can only serve to undermine the effective and evenhanded administration of justice,” Fitzpatrick said. “It must be rejected.”

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. CDLA, an affiliate of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, works insure that the individual rights guaranteed by the Connecticut and United States Constitutions are applied fairly and equally and that those rights are not diminished.

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