



SAFE California Campaign
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For Immediate Release

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Press Release

SAFE California Campaign to Replace Death Penalty Submits 800,000 Signatures to Qualify for November Ballot

First ever statewide vote on replacing the death penalty with life in prison with no chance of parole

CALIFORNIA – The SAFE California campaign announced the filing of **800,000** petition signatures Thursday morning at four simultaneous news conferences in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento and San Diego. The final number of signatures goes far and above the 504,000 required to qualify the SAFE California Act for the November 2012 ballot.

“California voters are ready to replace the death penalty with life in prison with no chance of parole,” said Jeanne Woodford, SAFE California spokesperson and former warden of San Quentin who oversaw four executions. “Those of us in law enforcement know that the best way to prevent crime is to solve it. Replacing the death penalty with a punishment of life in prison without parole will free up funds for critical tools like DNA testing in the shocking 46% of murder and 56% of reported rape cases that remain unsolved in our state every year.”

The SAFE California Act will save the state hundreds of millions of dollars. The initiative sets aside \$100 million of the budget savings – \$30 million a year, for three years – to solve open rape and murder cases.

The SAFE California ballot initiative will be the first ever statewide vote on replacing the death penalty with a punishment of life in prison with no chance of parole. Don Heller, who wrote California’s current death penalty law, is a strong supporter of the SAFE California Act: “I made a terrible mistake 34 years ago, but it is one that can be corrected by replacing the death penalty with life in prison without the possibility of parole.”

Ron Briggs, who helped pass the initiative that created the current death penalty system in 1978, joined SAFE California to announce the signature submission in Sacramento: “Had I known then what we do today, I would have pushed for strong life sentences without the possibility of parole. I still believe that society must be protected from the most heinous criminals, and that they don't deserve to ever again be free. But I'd like to see them serve their terms with the general prison population, where they could be required to work and pay restitution into the victims' compensation fund.”

The SAFE California Act requires those convicted of murder to work and pay restitution into a state victim compensation fund. “Our focus in times of fiscal crisis should be crystal clear. The death penalty wastes \$184 million a year over life without parole. That’s millions of dollars that can be put toward keeping our teachers, police and firefighters in their jobs,” said Gil Garcetti, former District Attorney for Los Angeles County. “I am confident that voters will say “YES” to SAFE California in Los Angeles and across California once they understand that the death penalty is actually much more expensive than a life sentence with absolutely no chance of parole,” added Garcetti, who signed the first petition in Los Angeles County for the SAFE California campaign.

Innocent people wrongfully convicted and later exonerated also expressed strong support for the measure. “As someone who was wrongfully convicted in California, I know that our criminal justice system makes terrible mistakes,” said Obie Anthony who was freed last October after spending 17 years in prison for a murder he did not commit. “Innocent people just like me have been executed in this country – there are 140 exonerees just from death row. The risk is just too high. The only way to prevent the ultimate injustice is to support SAFE California.”

Over 5,000 volunteers gathered signatures for the campaign in all 58 California counties.

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