

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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March 12, 2009

Governor Bill Richardson
490 Old Santa Fe Trail, Room 400
Santa Fe, NM 87501
Via Facsimile: 505-476-2226

Dear Governor Richardson:

On behalf of Human Rights Watch, I am writing to urge you to support HB 285, which would abolish capital punishment in New Mexico, and to sign the bill if it reaches your desk.

The United States stands increasingly alone among democratic nations in its continued use of the death penalty. In 2007, the United States carried out the fifth largest number executions in the world – behind China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. As a former Ambassador to the United Nations, you are in a unique position to know of the damage done to the reputation of the United States, and the friction caused in relations with its closest neighbors and allies, by its retention of the death penalty in a world that has increasingly turned its back on this barbaric practice.

But there are even more compelling reasons for New Mexico to abolish capital punishment. Since 1973, 130 persons – including four in New Mexico – have been released from US death rows after they were shown to be innocent of the crimes for which they had been sentenced to die. Some had come within days of execution. A mature democracy simply cannot tolerate the risk that a person will be executed for a crime he or she did not commit.

Unfortunately, it is clear that serious problems with administration of the death penalty persist in New Mexico. In 2007, the New Mexico Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *State v. Young* that compensation for defense counsel was so inadequate that the defendants, who were facing a possible death sentence, were deprived of the effective assistance of counsel.

HB 285 is part of a growing trend against the death penalty in the United States. Last year the number of new death sentences imposed fell to 111 – about one-third of the number imposed each year during the 1990s. Support for the death penalty as expressed in opinion polls has also fallen. Governors in Illinois and Maryland have declared moratoria on executions in recent years. And in December 2007, Governor Jon Corzine signed legislation abolishing capital punishment in New Jersey.

It appears that the people of New Mexico, through their elected representatives, will soon reject the death penalty. I urge you to respect their judgment, and to support and sign HB 285.

Very truly yours,

Kenneth Roth
Executive Director