

## **Death Penalty Abolition**

2009 Issues Briefing

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An important development in 2008 was the Illinois State Bar Association's (ISBA) adoption of an abolition position and their announced intent to push for a death penalty abolition bill in the General Assembly.

The Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (ICADP) invited advocates including the League, Amnesty International, the ACLU, and the ISBA to a strategy meeting on December 11, 2008. The executive director of The National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (NCADP), Diane Rust-Tierney, and other representatives of the NCADP also participated. The preliminary strategy is to aim at abolition of the death penalty in two years. 2009, then, would be a year of preparation: holding events aimed at educating the public and meeting with legislators, both to educate and to determine the likelihood and strength of their support for an abolition bill. A lobby day has tentatively been scheduled for March 12 in Springfield.

To prepare to communicate with legislators, the websites of the NCADP and the ICADP are most helpful. In addition, The Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC) is an excellent resource. The DPIC offers a weekly update on death penalty activity around the country that is an excellent means to become quickly conversant with the issues.

The ICADP reports that there are currently fifteen persons on death row in Illinois. In 2008, no sentences were handed down in Cook County, and only three persons were sentenced to death outside of Cook County-- in DuPage County, White County, and Jo Daviess County.

The DPIC's **Year End Report for 2008** states that 37 executions occurred last year in the United States. This is a 12% decline from the 42 executions in 2007. However, 23 executions are scheduled for the first five months in 2009 and more may be added to that number. As was true in 2008, almost all the executions scheduled are in the South and 12 of the 23 are in Texas. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reports that at the start of 2008, there were 3,309 people on death row, a decline of 1% from the year before. BJS reported 115 death sentences in 2007, the lowest number for any year since 1976. DPIC's projections indicate a similar number of death sentences for 2008.