

Maryland Catholic Conference commends death row commutations

By Catholic Review Staff

The Maryland Catholic Conference commended Gov. Martin J. O'Malley's Dec. 31 announcement that he will commute the state's four remaining death sentences to life without the possibility of parole.

"At the very least these commutations will put to an end the lengthy and heart-rending appeals process in these remaining cases," said a Dec. 31 statement from the MCC, the legislative advocacy arm of the state's Catholic bishops, "and we pray that fact brings some healing and peace to the families of their victims."

The MCC called the commutation "a welcome conclusion to the long journey toward ending capital punishment in Maryland," commending those who worked for the repeal of the death penalty two years ago.

In a Dec. 31 statement, O'Malley noted that Maryland's attorney general had argued that the carrying out of prior sentences is now illegal in absence of an existing statute.

"The question at hand is whether any public good is served by allowing these essentially un-executable sentences to stand," said O'Malley, who met with the families of murder victims before issuing the commutations. "In my judgment, leaving these death sentences in place does not serve the public good of the people of Maryland - present or future. Gubernatorial inaction - at this point in the legal process - would, in my judgment, needlessly and callously subject survivors, and the people of Maryland, to the ordeal of an endless appeals process, with unpredictable twists and turns, and without any hope of finality or closure."

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