

# MCC lauds N.J. death penalty recommendation

Praising the recommendation by a New Jersey panel to abolish the death penalty in favor of life imprisonment without parole in New Jersey, Richard J. Dowling, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, said it could serve as a “model” for Maryland.

The New Jersey Death Penalty Study Commission, created in 2005, submitted its findings Jan. 2 to Gov. Jon S. Corzine. In their report commission members said they did not find compelling evidence in support of capital punishment and also found that it costs taxpayers more than it does to incarcerate prisoners for life.

The commission voted 12-1 in opposition of the death penalty and said capital punishment is “inconsistent with evolving standards of decency, serves no legitimate penological purpose such as deterrence or retribution and is not worth the risk of making an irreversible mistake.”

Mr. Dowling said there is already strong support among Marylanders in favor of the state’s life-without-parole sentence as an acceptable substitute for the death penalty. He pointed to a 2005 Mason-Dixon poll conducted for the Maryland Catholic Conference which found 63 percent of voting-age Marylanders favor the life-without parole option over capital punishment.

The poll results also showed that Maryland Catholics are less supportive of capital punishment than other faith groups and more supportive of the alternative of life sentences without parole.

Mr. Dowling is optimistic that Gov.-elect Martin J. O’Malley will sign a ban on the death penalty if it is passed by the General Assembly.

“I hope we’re seeing a developing tide for repeal,” he said. “The new governor seems disposed to the prospect of repeal and it appears that Maryland voters are ready for change, as well.”

Mr. Dowling called it a “formidable challenge” to get a ban through the House of Delegates and the state Senate.

“As of right now, the votes aren’t there,” he said. “The new governor’s position should help change that and the New Jersey commission’s recommendation certainly can’t hurt.”

Currently Maryland is among several states holding up executions. A Dec. 19 ruling by the Maryland Court of Appeals called for a temporary halt in executions, saying the state had improperly followed protocols for lethal injections.

Catholic News Service contributed to this article.