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Now end the death penalty

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Yet another a study commission has recommended that New Jersey eliminate the death penalty. Similar proposals have been around ever since the state re- instituted capital punishment in 1982. Since that time, no one has been put to death in New Jersey. For the past year, there's even been an official moratorium on the death penalty.

Gov. Jon Corzine, a longtime opponent of the death penalty, and the leaders of the Democrat-controlled Legislature this week enthusiastically embraced the suggestion of eliminating it in favor of life without the possibility of parole.

Maybe now it will happen.

For whatever reason, while New Jersey officials have said they were against the death penalty for years, they never acted to repeal the law.

Eliminating the death penalty is not only morally right but economically sound. New Jersey's complicated appeals process, which has kept those on death row alive, means it costs more to keep the death penalty on the books that to incarcerate someone for life.

Further, resources expended to prosecute these cases can be rerouted to other areas of the criminal justice system. One suggestion made in the latest commission report is to do more for survivors of victims of homicides.

If deterring crime were the goal of the law, the report concludes, that has not been the result. Moreover, few prosecutors seek the death penalty, in part, perhaps, because juries are extraordinarily reluctant to impose it.

While it has been 24 years since capital punishment was put back on the books, it has been 43 years since the state has carried out an execution.

It's time to make the law consistent with practice.

There's no death penalty in 12 other states and the District of Columbia. It was outlawed in every state in 1972 when the U.S. Supreme Court found that death sentencing was so capri cious that it was akin to being struck by lightning.

Thirty-eight states, including New Jersey, rewrote capital punishment laws to satisfy the Supreme Court objections. But New Jersey would be the first to repeal the rewritten law.

It would be an unprecedented step but one that New Jersey should take.

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