

FOR: Illinois State Bar Association

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ILLINOIS STATE BAR ASSOCIATION ASSEMBLY VOTES TO SUPPORT ABOLISHMENT OF DEATH PENALTY

ST. LOUIS – The 201-member Assembly of the Illinois State Bar Association (ISBA) voted Saturday in favor of abolition of the death penalty in Illinois.

The vote came after presentations by former federal prosecutor Thomas Sullivan, past president of the ISBA Terrence K. Hegarty, and the President of the Illinois State's Attorneys Association, Joseph Birkett, State's Attorney of DuPage County.

After quoting from the dissent of retired Illinois Supreme Court Justice Moses Harrison, newly-installed ISBA president Jack C. Carey of Belleville, said, "The application of the death penalty in Illinois has been demonstrated to be flawed beyond any doubt. Our position is that the death penalty is not fixable and should be discontinued. To do otherwise would invite the grossest miscarriage of justice imaginable, the death of an innocent person."

Carey added that just as Abraham Lincoln was an abolitionist on the issue of slavery, the ISBA should be an abolitionist on the issue of the death penalty. Both issues involve basic human rights.

Sullivan, a partner at Jenner & Block law firm in Chicago, is a former U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. He told the Assembly that many of the 85 improvements recommended by a Governor's blue ribbon commission on capital punishment have not been enacted.

The Illinois State Bar Association's Assembly previously has considered death penalty issues, voting to support almost all recommendations in the Governor's commission report, and successfully urging adoption of a capital litigation fund to provide uniform funding for defense and prosecution of capital cases.

Saturday's vote was the first time the Association has voted to favor abolition of the death penalty. The Association will lend its active support to legislation in the Illinois legislature aimed at abolishing the death penalty.

Created in 1877, the ISBA, with offices in Springfield and Chicago, is the state's largest bar association with 35,000 members.