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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Virginia Makes History as the First Southern State to Abolish the Death Penalty: Ending a Practice deeply Entwined with Virginia's Shameful History of Lynching and Racial Oppression**

RICHMOND, Va. — Today, the Virginia State Senate and House passed two identical bills ([SB 1165](#) and [HB 2263](#)) to abolish the death penalty in Virginia. This historic bi-partisan vote in the General Assembly makes Virginia the first state in the South to abolish capital punishment. Governor Ralph Northam has assured advocates that he will sign the bill when it reaches his desk.

"Virginia has taken its place in history as the first state in the South to eliminate the death penalty," said **Rev. Dr. LaKeisha Cook, Justice Reform Organizer at the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy**. "This monumental victory for justice is a significant step in acknowledging the racist legacy of capital punishment as we seek to collectively heal the deep wounds of racism. We are hopeful that other states and the Federal government will follow suit. We are also grateful to the faith leaders, congregants, and advocates for justice who joined us in the fight to end the death penalty and rid our Commonwealth of this historical injustice. This victory would not have been possible without their voices and support."

**Benjamin Hoyne, Policy & Campaigns Director at Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy** said, "People of faith and goodwill across the Commonwealth and across the nation are overjoyed at the actions taken in Virginia today. We thank Senator Surovell and Delegate Mullin for their leadership on this legislation and we commend Governor Northam for putting the weight of his office behind the movement to rid our Commonwealth of this historical injustice."

**Rev. Lauren Ramseur, Co-Pastor, Voices of Jubilee - Presbyterian Church USA, and board member of the Virginia Interfaith Center**, said, "This is a historic day for Virginia as we begin to address the injustice, racism, and violence that has been done in our name for over 400 years. As people of faith, we believe that violence cannot be a solution to violence. Today, we are taking a lead as the first southern state to abolish the death penalty and we are inviting other states and people of faith to rise up and join the movement for justice."

“I’ve always hoped and prayed that one day the Commonwealth of Virginia would recognize its place as the cradle of this nation’s government. Today’s vote to abolish the death penalty represents a tremendous step towards Virginia assuming her role as a leader for change. It says that we are building a justice system that is truly just,” said **Rev. Dr. Keith Jones, President of Tidewater Metro Baptist Ministers’ Conference, Senior Pastor Shiloh Baptist Church, and board member of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy.**” We know that this cruel punishment has been meted out to the underserved, underrepresented and voiceless of our Commonwealth.”

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy is grateful to Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Project, ACLU Virginia, and the thousands of advocates, faith leaders, and organizations from across the Commonwealth who have been working on this issue for decades. VICPP is especially thankful to the [430 faith leaders who signed a statement](#) calling on the legislature to abolish the death penalty. The statement proclaims, **“It is time to address this historical sin and end state-ordered execution in Virginia.”**

#### **RESOURCES:**

[Fact sheet](#) on historical connection between Virginia’s use of the death penalty and lynching

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*The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy advocates economic, racial, social, and environmental justice in Virginia’s policies and practices through education, prayer, and action. VICPP is a non-partisan coalition of more than 750 faith communities working for a more just society.*