

MEDIA ADVISORY: October 27, 2008

CONTACT: Kurt Rosenberg, 215-609-9462 or 215-387-1831

**EXONERATED EX-DEATH ROW PRISONERS CALL FOR
EXAMINATION OF TEXAS DEATH PENALTY SYSTEM**

Two dozen exonerated ex-death row prisoners from across the country will hold a news conference to call for the establishment of a statewide commission on wrongful convictions while a moratorium is imposed on executions in Texas.

WHEN: 2:00 p.m., Friday, October 31, 2008

WHERE: Speaker's Committee Room. Room 2W.6 Texas State Capitol

DETAILS: The 24 men are members of Witness to Innocence, a national organization composed of exonerated former death row prisoners and their loved ones. They spent a combined total of nearly 200 years on death row for crimes they did not commit. They will be joined by State Rep. Elliot Naishtat and former Bexar County District Attorney Sam Millsap. Naishtat (D-Travis County) is a longtime supporter of a moratorium on executions, while Millsap has become an outspoken critic of the death penalty since the 1993 execution of Ruben Cantu, who many believe was innocent.

Last month, Texas became third in the nation in death-row exonerations when Michael Blair was the 130th person exonerated from death row. Blair's exoneration came on the heels of a statement by Dallas County District Attorney Craig Watkins that he will re-examine nearly 40 death penalty convictions and would halt executions, if necessary, to give the reviews time to proceed. Watkins said he wanted to ensure that no innocent people were executed during his tenure. Witness to Innocence believes the rest of the state should follow Watkins' lead and halt executions while it studies its broken death-penalty system, which has exonerated nine people from death row since 1987, third only to Florida and Illinois in death-row exonerations.

Texas has executed 417 people since the reinstatement of the death penalty, accounting for nearly 40 percent of all executions

nationwide, including 12 so far this year. An additional 16 executions are scheduled in Texas this fall and winter, and in the next few weeks the state is expected to set a record of 10 executions in 30 days.

NOTE: Members of Witness to Innocence will be available for interviews following the news conference.