

NC Religious Leaders Speaking Out Against Repeal of Racial Justice Act

In the wake of a new bill that effectively repeals the NC Racial Justice Act – introduced into the NC House yesterday on the anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. – religious leaders across North Carolina are speaking out in favor of the Racial Justice Act.

“North Carolina has a history of racial epithets in capital jury rooms, all-white juries clearly valuing the lives of white victims more than black victims, and innocent minority defendants being sentenced to die,” said the Rev. Gail McAfee of Fayetteville. “To take away the protection of the Racial Justice Act is to turn your back on fairness and equal justice under law. The fact that this bill was introduced on the anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. shows the kind of racial insensitivity that the Racial Justice Act protects against.”

More than 600 religious leaders across the state have endorsed a letter in favor of the Racial Justice Act. Some of them will be speaking at press conferences coming up. The next local press conference will take place on Thursday, April 7 in Shallotte, NC at 11 a.m. at St. Brendan the Navigator Catholic Church, 5101 Ocean Highway West.

Other such press conferences on the Racial Justice Act are expected in Oxford, Hope Mills, Raleigh and other cities in upcoming weeks. Similar press conferences with religious leaders were held in Greenville and Elizabeth City, NC last week.

“This new bill will put a grinding halt to the attempt that's being made to address the real and insidious effects of racial bias in our state's courts and death penalty cases,” said the Rev. Joshua Bower, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Whiteville. “Racial bias has absolutely no place in the death penalty and this new bill will, effectively, remove such protections.”

‘James Crow, Jr.’ Act

The new bill is called the Act to Reform the Racial Justice Act of 2009.

“They should call the new bill the James Crow, Jr. Act,” said Stephen Dear, executive director of People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, a national nonprofit organization based in Carrboro, NC. “This new bill’s supporters seem to want to take us back to the days of noose lapel pins in the courtroom and racial epithets in the jury room. They seem to like the days of no checks on all-white juries. They seem to like that 76 percent of all people executed by the state of North Carolina have been black. They seem to like the fact that defendants who kill white victims are three times more likely to receive a death sentence than those who kill non-whites.”

In February a Forsyth County, NC Superior Court ruled the Racial Justice Act constitutional.

The press conferences are being coordinated by People of Faith Against the Death Penalty. More info: www.pfadp.org.

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