

Future of death penalty to be decided by California voters

By Maura Dolan, Los Angeles Times

California is set for a major debate on the death penalty following qualification Monday of a November ballot measure that would replace capital punishment with a life term without possibility of parole.



If passed, the measure would make California the 18th state in the nation without a death penalty. During the last five years, four states have replaced the death penalty and Connecticut is soon to follow.

Growing numbers of conservatives in California have joined the effort to repeal the state's capital punishment law, expressing frustration with its price tag and the rarity of executions. California has executed 13 inmates in 23 years, and prisoners are far more likely to die of old age on death row than by the executioner's needle.

November's ballot measure would commute the sentences of more than 700 people on death row to life without possibility of parole, a term that would then become the state's most severe form of criminal punishment.

Most death row inmates would be returned to the general prison population and be expected to work. Their earnings would go to crime victims.

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