

Judge's ruling on Calif. death penalty stuns experts

By Maura Dolan and Victoria Kim, Los Angeles Times

A federal judge's ruling that California's death penalty is unconstitutional was described by legal experts Wednesday as stunning and unprecedented.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Cormac J. Carney found that decades-long delays and uncertainty about whether condemned inmates will ever be executed violate the constitution's ban on cruel or unusual punishment.

Carney issued his ruling in a decision that overturned the death sentence of Ernest Dewayne Jones, a Los Angeles man sentenced to die for the 1992 rape and murder of Julia Miller, his girlfriend's mother.

In overturning Jones' death sentence, Carney noted that the inmate faced "complete uncertainty as to when, or even whether" he would be executed.

He pointed out that more than 900 people have been sentenced to death in California since 1978 but only 13 have been executed.

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