

# Lawsuit calls for quicker executions in Calif.

By Don Thompson, AP

SACRAMENTO – A victims' rights organization sued California state officials on Thursday as it seeks to speed up executions that have been on hold since 2006.

Sacramento-based Criminal Justice Legal Foundation filed a petition in Sacramento County Superior Court asking a judge to order state corrections officials to adopt procedures for a single-drug, barbiturate-only method of execution.

State policy calls for using a series of three drugs to put condemned inmates to death. The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is drafting new lethal injection regulations after Gov. Jerry Brown said in April 2012 the state would switch to a single-drug injection.

However, department spokeswoman Deborah Hoffman said a nationwide shortage of execution drugs is slowing progress. She declined to comment on the lawsuit.

The foundation says the department is taking too long to adopt the new regulations. No executions can occur until the new rules are adopted.

It is asking the judge to order the state to adopt temporary regulations within 30 days and take immediate steps to adopt permanent regulations.

The foundation sought the court order on behalf of Kermit Alexander, whose mother, sister and two nephews were murdered in 1984, and Bradley Winchell, whose sister was raped and murdered in 1983, contending that as relatives of the victims they are affected by the continued delays.

Alexander and Winchell said in nearly identical letters to Corrections Secretary Jeffrey Beard in September that the murders of their relatives took place 30 years ago, yet there is "no end in sight" for the convicted killers solely because of the department's failure to adopt the new regulations.

Executions in California have also been halted by a series of legal challenges over the last eight years, most recently when a federal judge in Los Angeles ruled in July that carrying out the death penalty takes so long that it amounts to unconstitutional cruel and unusual punishment. Attorney General Kamala Harris is appealing that ruling.

The judge noted that more than 900 people have been sentenced to death in California since the current death penalty system was adopted 35 years ago. But only 13 have been executed, leaving most condemned inmates to die of natural causes before their executions are carried out.