

Voters may have say in Calif. death penalty

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

Opponents of California's death penalty began an initiative campaign Monday to repeal the state's capital punishment law at the polls in November and said they've lined up some conservative support and \$2 million in financial backing.

The measure, if it qualifies, would be on the ballot four years after another initiative to repeal the death penalty received 48 percent of the statewide vote. Sponsors said they hope to succeed this time as new reports in several states have surfaced of onetime Death Row inmates found to be innocent, leading to a decline in public support for capital punishment.

The measure may face competition on the ballot in the form of an initiative proposed by death-penalty supporters to speed up executions in California, where appeals by condemned prisoners typically take two decades or more. The rival measure would set strict deadlines for filing appeals and for rulings by the state Supreme Court, and would seek to expand the pool of death-penalty lawyers to include all attorneys who accept court appointments to represent impoverished defendants.

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