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CONTACT: Jeff Caruso, Executive Director
804-225-8565 (office)

Virginia Bishops Praise Governor's Rejection of Death Penalty Expansions, Call on General Assembly to Sustain Vetoes

On behalf of Virginia's Catholic bishops, Virginia Catholic Conference Director Jeff Caruso expressed gratitude to the Governor for vetoing five bills that would have expanded the Commonwealth's death penalty. Caruso called the vetoes "a desperately needed first step toward slowing down a system of punishment that has sped out of control in our Commonwealth for a long time." Since 1976, Virginia has carried out 98 executions, more than any state except Texas.

Earlier this year, the General Assembly enacted a package of five bills that, together, sought to add accomplices to a murder (*i.e.*, those other than the "triggerman"), those who murder a judge, and those who murder a subpoenaed crime witness to the list of individuals who could receive a death sentence in Virginia. The Virginia Catholic Conference, the public-policy arm of the Commonwealth's Catholic bishops and their two dioceses, opposed those measures during the legislative session and will now renew its advocacy efforts by urging the legislature to sustain the Governor's vetoes during the one-day reconvened session on April 4.

Caruso said that Richmond Bishop Francis DiLorenzo and Arlington Bishop Paul Loverde oppose the use of the death penalty in Virginia because "it is never necessary to ensure public safety here, especially given the availability of a life-without-parole sentence." He expressed hope that the Governor's vetoes "will encourage legislators to begin looking for ways to curb use of the death penalty rather than expand it."