



**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
20301 MAIL SERVICE CENTER • RALEIGH, NC 27699-0301**

**BEVERLY EAVES PERDUE
GOVERNOR**

December 14, 2011

GOVERNOR'S OBJECTIONS AND VETO MESSAGE

Senate Bill 9, "An Act to Reform the Racial Justice Act of 2009 to be Consistent With the United States Supreme Court's Ruling in McCleskey v. Kemp."

I am – and always will be – a strong supporter of the death penalty. I firmly believe that some crimes are so heinous that no other punishment is adequate. As long as I am Governor, I am committed to ensuring that the death penalty remains a viable punishment option in North Carolina in appropriate cases.

However, because the death penalty is the ultimate punishment, it is essential that it be carried out fairly and that the process not be infected with prejudice based on race, gender, poverty, or any other factor. I signed the Racial Justice Act into law two years ago because it ensured that racial prejudice would not taint the application of the death penalty.

By enacting Senate Bill 9, the new leadership of the General Assembly has abandoned the noble principles embodied in the Racial Justice Act. While some have tried to portray Senate Bill 9 as a mere "modification" of the Racial Justice Act, make no mistake – this is, for all practical purposes, an outright repeal.

I recognize that this is an issue that people feel strongly about. Over the past few weeks, I have had the privilege of meeting with people from the four corners of our State who shared their candid views about this issue with me. I have met both with family members of murder victims who support Senate Bill 9 and with family members who oppose it. I was greatly moved by their personal stories and came away with a profound admiration for their passion and dignity in the face of grief that most of us cannot imagine. I have also spoken to both prosecutors and defense attorneys – lawyers who meet the highest ideals of the legal profession. I conducted these meetings because I wanted to ensure that groups on both sides of the issue had the opportunity to express their views to me.

There has been a great deal of inaccurate information in the media over what the Racial Justice Act does. Let me be clear on what it does not do. First, it does not change the fact that the death penalty is legal in North Carolina.



Second, the Racial Justice Act does not reopen the question of whether any person on death row is guilty or innocent. Instead, it only addresses sentencing; it provides that a convicted defendant is entitled to have his death sentence changed to a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole if a judge determines that race was a significant factor in the decision to seek or impose a sentence of death as set out in the Act.

Third, contrary to what some have suggested, the Racial Justice Act does not allow anyone to be released from prison or seek parole. Rather, by its plain language, the only thing the law would allow is for a death sentence to be converted to a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole – and that would only occur if a judge finds that racial discrimination played a significant role in the application of the death penalty. Both my own legal counsel and legal experts from across the State have assured me that even if an inmate succeeds on a claim under the Act, his sole remedy is life in prison without the possibility of parole. In addition, the executive director of North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services has publicly stated that her organization would decline to represent any prisoner seeking to argue an entitlement to parole after prevailing under the Racial Justice Act because that argument would be, in her words, “frivolous.”

Finally, I want to emphasize that no prisoner will have their death sentences changed to life in prison without the possibility of parole unless they prove to a judge, through competent evidence, that racial discrimination did, in fact, play a significant role in the application of the death penalty.

I am vetoing Senate Bill 9 for the same reason that I signed the Racial Justice Act two years ago: it is simply unacceptable for racial prejudice to play a role in the imposition of the death penalty in North Carolina.

Therefore, I veto this bill.



Beverly Eaves Perdue

This bill, having been vetoed, is returned to the Clerk of the North Carolina Senate on this ~~14th~~ day of December, 2011 at ~~9:00~~ for reconsideration by that body.

RECEIVED FROM GOVERNOR

Date: December 14, 2011

Time: 12:10 p.m.

Sarah Clapp