

PRESS STATEMENT OF  
MOST REV. MICHAEL F. BURBIDGE, BISHOP OF RALEIGH  
AND  
MOST REV. PETER J. JUGIS, BISHOP OF CHARLOTTE  
ON THE NORTH CAROLINA RACIAL JUSTICE ACT

May 28, 2009

My name is Monsignor Michael Clay and I serve as legislative liaison and lobbyist for the two Catholic bishops of North Carolina, Bishop Michael Burbidge of Raleigh and Bishop Peter Jugis of Charlotte. Due to previous commitments, they are unable to be present to participate in this news conference concerning the North Carolina Racial Justice Act. On their behalf, I have been asked to read a statement from them.

We join together with Christian leaders of many traditions in support of a good racial justice act in North Carolina. The original intention of this act is praiseworthy in light of the tragic history of black men who have been given a death sentence in our state clearly motivated by race, a history that extends to the present. We applaud the courage of the Legislature in acknowledging this evil through the enrollment of this bill in both chambers. The Senate has admitted, by passing their version of the Racial Justice Act, that there has been and still is racial injustice in our legal system. While we have come a long way in the past 50 years in reducing racism and discrimination, they still remain a blight in our society. The original version of the Racial Justice Act is a positive step in our effort to do the right thing when it comes to equal justice for all people under the law.

If the Racial Justice Act passed by the Senate had remained in its original form, we would be standing here applauding it. For reasons that still mystify us, this good bill became a bad bill when it was amended in the Senate to authorize licensed health care professionals to ignore the Hippocratic oath to save lives by allowing them to administer lethal drugs to a human being with impunity. The juxtaposition of this amendment with the original intention of a racial justice act is hard to imagine. A bill that acknowledges that black men have been put to death due to racial bias and at the same time restores the practice of capital punishment in a state where such bias has unjustifiably placed black men on Death Row in North Carolina to the present day is beyond comprehension.

We ask the House of Representatives to vote in favor of the original version of the Racial Justice Act and for the Senate to endorse the House's decision when the time comes for them to resolve their differences so that we may have a law that truly reflects the values and principles we know will contribute to justice for all people in our state.