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January 6, 2006

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COLEMAN'S DNA TEST A "QUALITY CHECK" ON THE SYSTEM

DNA Test Proves Virginia's Roger Coleman Guilty

The Constitution Project congratulates Virginia Governor Mark Warner for his courageous decision to test Roger Coleman's DNA. It took more than 15 years, but we now know that Mr. Coleman guilty of the crime for which he was executed in 1992.

Governor Warner's decision to test the DNA allows the public to put this matter to rest, and it provides important information about the accuracy of our criminal justice system.

We should never hesitate to learn about whether our system is working and about the ways in which it needs to be improved to make sure that justice is done.

William S. Sessions, FBI Director under President's Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton, and a member of the Constitution Project's bipartisan blue-ribbon committee on the death penalty, said "I am proud that, when I was FBI Director, the Bureau instituted the nation's first DNA testing program. But I was stunned and amazed to discover the extent to which DNA testing proved other forensic tests were wrong. In a criminal case, there is nothing more important than doing everything we can to make sure that we have the guilty party in custody and that we do not mistakenly ensnare the innocent. The results in the Coleman case do not change that."

In *Mandatory Justice: Eighteen Reforms to the Death Penalty*, the Constitution Project's bipartisan blue-ribbon committee issued recommendations for reform of our capital punishment system because of committee members' profound concerns about the risk of wrongful executions. The Committee's recommendations include recommendations that DNA evidence should be retained and tested whenever it could "establish innocence or avoid unjust execution." An update of the committee's initial report, with additional recommendations on DNA testing, forensic lab integrity, and many other issues, is set to released shortly.

According to Sessions, "DNA testing is a way to perform a "quality check" on our system." Our system of justice may be slow and sometimes imperfect but it helps us to find out the truth and do justice."

The Constitution Project seeks to formulate bipartisan solutions to contemporary constitutional and legal issues by combining high-level scholarship and public education.

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