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WASHINGTON, DC --The NAACP announced last week that the North Carolina State Legislature passed the North Carolina Racial Justice Act. This Act, the first of its kind, will allow inmates sentenced to death, to challenge the racial fairness of their sentencing.

“This is a monumental victory for the NAACP, the residents of North Carolina, and for the innocent men and women sentenced to Death Row. The passage of the Racial Justice Act makes North Carolina the first state in the south to provide this type of remedy and should be a model for other states throughout the nation,” stated NAACP President and CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous. “Under the stewardship of our North Carolina State Conference President, Reverend William Barber II, this important piece of legislation now lies in the hands of Governor Purdue, and we urge her to sign it and allow the 98 people on death row in North Carolina the chance to get a fair trial.”

The North Carolina State Senate voted 25-18 on Tuesday to pass the legislation, and the bill awaits the Governor’s signature.

“The passage of the Racial Justice Act is a major step not only in North Carolina, but potentially in the South for dealing with the continuing legacy of systemic racism in the application of the death penalty,” said Barber II, President of the NAACP North Carolina State Conference.

North Carolina currently has 163 people on death row, 60 percent of whom are Black. Supporters of the Racial Justice Act point to a 2001 study by researchers at UNC-Chapel Hill that found that the odds of a defendant receiving the death penalty in North Carolina increase if the victim of the murder is white.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.