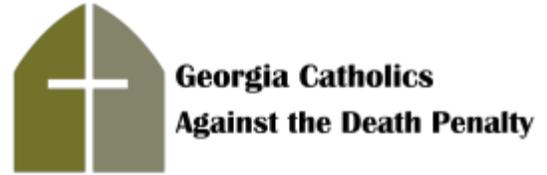


# Georgia House Bill 702: Death Penalty Repeal

Parish Action Kit



## Introduction

A bipartisan group of legislators, led by two Catholics, have introduced [House Bill 702](#). If enacted, this bill would repeal the death penalty in Georgia and replace it with life without parole. This powerful action would move our state even further in the pro-life direction it has already undertaken. As Catholics, we uphold the dignity and value of all human life, even in the case of someone who has done great harm. As our catechism teaches:

*2267. Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good.*

*Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.*

*Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person”, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide”.*

Repeal of the death penalty is fully in line with Catholic moral and social teaching. However, in order for this bill to pass, we need to move quickly to encourage our legislators to hold a hearing on House Bill 702 in the Georgia House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee. That is the first step toward moving it to a vote on the floor of the House.

**There are two targeted actions that we are asking Catholics to take to help increase the likelihood of this hearing taking place:**

1. Most importantly – **contact your legislators directly** (in person, phone, letter, or email) and ask them to urge Speaker David Ralston and Chairman Chuck Efration to hold a hearing as soon as possible on House Bill 702. Information on how to contact legislators about this bill (with sample wording) can be found online at <https://www.gacadp.org/repeal>.
2. **Conduct a signature drive for a petition to legislators**, urging them to hold a hearing on House Bill 702 as soon as possible

This document is written to offer suggestions and resources on conducting a successful petition drive, based on experience at parishes across the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

## Contents

|                                                        |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Introduction .....                                     | 1 |
| How to conduct a petition drive – best practices ..... | 2 |
| Before the day of the drive .....                      | 2 |
| On the day of the drive .....                          | 3 |
| The petition sheets .....                              | 3 |
| Handling questions, feedback, and opposition.....      | 3 |
| After the drive.....                                   | 4 |
| Questions .....                                        | 4 |
| Supporting Materials .....                             | 5 |
| Petition.....                                          | 6 |
| Bulletin Announcement / Email or Social Media .....    | 9 |
| Presider’s Pulpit Announcement .....                   | 9 |
| Death Penalty Prayers of the Faithful .....            | 9 |

## How to conduct a petition drive – best practices

A petition drive is an effective method to mobilize large groups of parishioners to take action right after Mass. The goal is to educate parishioners and then provide an immediate and tangible action step with real-world application. The signatures gathered are shared with the Archdiocese and then presented to legislators along with those gathered from other parishes. This type of action shows the broad level of support for repeal of the death penalty and makes it easier for legislators to vote to support House Bill 702.

### Before the day of the drive

Leading up to the day of the drive, key steps include

1. **Secure the support of the pastor** (most important), then seek the support of other clergy and lay ministry leaders. Please do not conduct a drive without the explicit support of the pastor of your parish.
2. Prepare the groundwork for a petition drive at least one to two weeks in advance with [bulletin announcements](#) and email/social media communication
3. Recruit volunteers to staff a table in the narthex on the day(s) of the drive. It is best to conduct the drive right after each Mass.
4. Educate yourselves and prospective volunteers about the death penalty and House Bill 702
5. Please let us know that your parish is planning to conduct a drive and let us know if we can help or answer any questions ([contact information is below](#))

## On the day of the drive

On the day of the drive, key steps include:

1. Setup a table or area in the narthex or outside of the church
2. Print up plenty of [petition sheets](#) and have pens and clipboards (optional) available
3. Print up the wording of the petition in [large sheets](#) so parishioners can see what they are signing ahead of time
4. Include signage on the table explaining what today's action is about
5. Include fact sheet and background information from GACADP.
6. Ask the pastor and daily presiders/deacons if they would consider preaching a homily that ties in the death penalty on the day of the drive
7. Include one or more [prayers of the faithful](#) that touch upon the death penalty and/or repeal
8. Ask the presider to include an [announcement from the pulpit](#) at the end of Mass asking parishioners to take part in the petition drive. This simple step has been shown to dramatically increase participation by departing parishioners
9. Most importantly – gather signatures as people depart Mass!

## The petition sheets

The petition sheet will be delivered to key legislators in bulk – after many parishes have concluded their drives. This increases the impact of showing significant numbers of supporters.

It is most important that people put their name and address on the petition sheet. This allows legislators to see that people in their respective districts are supporting the legislation.

Gathering an email address is important, but optional. If people would like to stay informed about this legislation and our collective efforts, they should feel free to provide an email and check the box “keep me updated”. Email communication is purposely kept minimal, with only the most critical and timely information being shared. Parishioners can remove themselves at any time from the email list if it becomes a burden to them.

## Handling questions, feedback, and opposition

Inevitably, you will receive questions and feedback from some parishioners. Remember that while education is part of the goal of a petition drive, it is primarily designed to gather as many signatures as possible to increase the chances of this legislation passing. Fact sheets should be available to try and help answer questions and further educate parishioners after Mass.

It might be helpful to have one volunteer available to answer questions and hand out a fact sheet, while others focus on facilitating signatures. Having a person or two walking about with a clipboard helps reach people who might not be able to sign at the table.

Occasionally, you will encounter a parishioner who is questioning church teaching on capital punishment, or openly hostile and in opposition. Always remember that our teaching on capital punishment is firmly grounded in the Catechism and on the respect for the dignity and value of all human life. Nothing in the repeal of the death penalty is meant to signal that we do not care about the rights and dignity of victims or their families. On the contrary, eliminating the death penalty is a powerful sign of our community's respect for ALL life. We always mourn the loss of lives taken in murder and offer prayers, outreach, and services to victims' families. Please do not feel that you must

“convert” someone on the spot. Simply offer them the fact sheet on capital punishment and encourage them to pray on the issue, or make an appointment to speak to the pastor, parochial vicar(s), or deacon(s) of the parish.

### After the drive

After the drive is complete:

1. Gather all the signature sheets and count up the number of signatures received
2. Send the completed petition sheets to the attention of:  
  
Imelda Richard  
Archdiocese of Atlanta  
2401 Lake Park Dr SE  
Smyrna, GA 30080
3. Include a bulletin and/or email/social media communication announcing the number of signatures collected and thanking parishioners for their participation
4. Continue to educate parishioners on church teaching on life and dignity and progress on HB702. Urge parishioners who want to do more to consider reaching out directly to their state representative. Information on how to do that (and what to say) can be found at <https://www.gacadp.org/repeal>.

### Questions

For any questions about conducting your drive, please contact either Deacon Dick Tolcher ([rtolcher@archatl.com](mailto:rtolcher@archatl.com)) or Deacon Erik Wilkinson ([ewilkinson@ihmatlanta.org](mailto:ewilkinson@ihmatlanta.org)). They can either help you directly or refer a member of the task force to help.

# Supporting Materials

## Petition

The following two pages contains the standard petition sheets being used across the Archdiocese. Please print “as is” and make an appropriate number of copies for signature on the day of the drive.

1. The first page contains large font of the wording that parishioners are being asked to sign. It’s good to have several of these out and available at the time of the drive.
2. The second is the actual petition itself with room for 10 signatures per sheet.

The petition sheet will be delivered to key legislators in bulk – after many parishes have concluded their drives. This increases the impact of showing significant numbers of supporters.

It is most important that people put their name and address on the petition sheet. This allows legislators to see that people in their respective districts are supporting the legislation.

Gathering an email address is important, but optional. If people would like to stay informed about this legislation and our collective efforts, they should feel free to provide an email and check the box “keep me updated”. Email communication is purposely kept minimal, with only the most critical and timely information being shared. Parishioners can remove themselves at any time from the email list if it becomes a burden to them.

We, the undersigned, respectfully urge the Georgia House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee to hold a hearing as soon as possible on House Bill 702. HB702 would repeal the death penalty in Georgia and replace it with life without parole. As pro-life people, we cannot accept the risk of wrongful conviction, leading to the execution of an innocent person. Six people have already been exonerated from death row here in Georgia. The imposition of the death penalty is riddled with racial bias and unequal justice for the accused. In addition, millions of dollars are spent on capital trials, incarceration, and lengthy appeals. This money would be better invested in solving other crimes, investing in education to prevent crime, and providing more services to victims and their families. Georgia already leads the way with some of the nation's strongest pro-life laws. Now we need your support to expand that commitment with a hearing on HB702. Thank you!



### Bulletin Announcement / Email or Social Media

This year, the Georgia Legislature is poised to take up House Bill 702. If enacted, this bill would repeal the death penalty in Georgia and replace it with life without parole. This powerful action would move our state even further in the pro-life direction it has already undertaken. As Catholics, we uphold the dignity and value of all human life, even in the case of someone who has done great harm. Repealing the death penalty would remove the risk of wrongful conviction and accidentally executing an innocent person. Six people have already been exonerated from death row here in Georgia. The imposition of the death penalty is riddled with racial bias and unequal justice for the accused. In addition, the millions of dollars spent on capital trials, incarceration, and lengthy appeals could be better invested in solving other crimes, investing in education to prevent crime, and providing more services to victims and their families. Georgia already leads the way with some of the nation's strongest pro-life laws. Now we need your support to expand that commitment.

Next weekend [OR INSERT DATE], members of our [INSERT PARISH MINISTRY OR INDIVIDUALS] ministry will be in the narthex after Mass collecting signatures to send to our legislators. Please add your voice and ask for a hearing on House Bill 702!

For more information about this legislation, and for additional steps you can take to contact legislators, please visit <https://www.gacadp.org/repeal>.

### Presider's Pulpit Announcement

This year, the Georgia Legislature is poised to take up House Bill 702. If enacted, this bill would repeal the death penalty in Georgia and replace it with life without parole. This powerful action would move our state even further in the pro-life direction it has already undertaken. As Catholics, we uphold the dignity and value of all human life, even in the case of someone who has done great harm. Repealing the death penalty would remove the risk of wrongful conviction and accidentally executing an innocent person. The millions of dollars spent on capital trials, incarceration, and lengthy appeals could be better invested in solving other crimes, investing in education to prevent crime, and providing more services to victims and their families.

Members of our [INSERT PARISH MINISTRY OR INDIVIDUALS] ministry will be in the narthex after Mass today collecting signatures to send to our legislators. Please add your voice and ask for a hearing on House Bill 702!

### Death Penalty Prayers of the Faithful

Adapted from <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prayer-to-end-the-use-of-the-death-penalty.cfm>

Merciful Father, we ask your blessing on all we do to build a culture of life. Hear our prayers for those impacted by the death penalty.

We pray for all people, that their lives and dignity as children of a loving God may be respected and protected in all stages and circumstances.

We pray for victims of violence and their families, that they may experience our love and support and find comfort in your compassion and in the promise of eternal life.

We pray for those on death row, that their lives may be spared, that the innocent may be freed and that the guilty may come to acknowledge their faults and seek reconciliation with you.

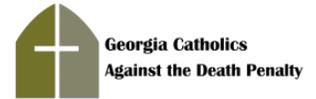
We pray for the families of those who are facing execution, that they may be comforted by your love and compassion.

We pray for civic leaders, that they may commit themselves to respecting every human life and ending the use of the death penalty in our land, especially by supporting Georgia House Bill 702.

Compassionate Father, give us wisdom and hearts filled with your love. Guide us as we work to end the use of the death penalty and to build a society that truly chooses life in all situations.

We ask this Father through your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

# About Georgia Catholics Against the Death Penalty



## Vision and Mission

**Vision:** Abolition of the death penalty in the state of Georgia

**Mission:** To educate Catholics on Church teaching about capital punishment and to encourage action to end its use in Georgia

## Overview

Upholding the dignity of the human person, the Catholic Church teaches that capital punishment is incompatible with the gospel and can no longer be justified in modern society. Though the death penalty is still carried out in Georgia at an alarming pace, Catholics and other people of faith are increasingly coming forward in opposition to its use. In order to build on their good works, [Georgia Catholics Against the Death Penalty](#) (GACADP) is organized to promote a spirituality of respect for life that encompasses victims of violent crime as well as those at risk of execution for capital offenses.

Focusing initially on the Archdiocese of Atlanta, GACADP serves as the Georgia unit of the [Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty](#). Working directly with the archdiocesan office of Prison and Jail Ministry, in cooperation with the Respect Life Ministry and Parish and Social Justice Ministry, GACADP works to build a network of parish leaders and other concerned Catholics to foster ongoing prayerful witness against the death penalty. This network serves three related purposes:

**Education:** Educate local Catholics about Church teaching on capital punishment.

**Mobilization:** Provide a mechanism to share information, events and calls to action across the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

**Action:** Encourage a Catholic presence at vigils, protests and legislative actions aimed at awareness, moratorium and abolition of the death penalty.

## Guiding Principles

- As Catholics, we believe that life is sacred from conception until natural death
- We uphold the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which declares that “*the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person*”
- We also uphold the statements of recent popes, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and our own bishops here in Georgia who have called for us to create a “culture of life”
- We work hand-in-hand with those Catholic organizations in Georgia and in the wider Catholic community who seek to promote a culture of life and end the death penalty
- We also work cooperatively with like-minded individuals and organizations seeking to end the death penalty in our state
- With guidance from the Georgia Catholic Conference, we engage public officials and the broader community in order to shape public opinion and influence legislators to enact life-affirming policies