

Homiletic Suggestion – Respect Life – **New** Georgia House Bill #485

Abolish the Death Penalty
&
Commute all existing Death Penalty Sentences to Life without Parole

ACTION ALERT: As a matter of urgency, we ask parishioners to contact your Georgia House representatives, to ask them to convey to their Judicial Non-Civil Committee colleagues that their constituents ask for a hearing on bill #485 at this time.

Then please go to www.gacadp.org/repeal to identify your representatives, to submit your online petition, to call them, and to submit letters to your legislators.

Introduction. The Atlanta Archdiocese Death Penalty Task Force Team has asked the clergy to speak again, about abolishing the death penalty in Georgia. There was significant effort about this initiative last year, then the COVID virus and the recent Georgia election, placed their efforts into a temporary dormant status. Now there are newly elected legislators and a new bill to end the death penalty in Georgia. **The team has converted the signature drive from in-person signing, to an online process.**

Background. Recently, a new bipartisan bill #485 was introduced to the Georgia legislature, to abolish the death penalty in Georgia, and commute all remaining death penalty sentences to life without parole. This bill will end the use of the death penalty as a form of punishment.

Respect Life

2018. Respecting life applies to ALL human beings. Pope Francis modified section 2267 of the Catechism, changing the church’s position on this issue. Now the Catechism states, “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.”¹

2020. *Fratelli Tutti Encyclical.*² Pope Francis reiterates the importance of the value of life, including the lives of those who are on death row.

Catholics respect life from the moment of conception to natural death. Pro-life means all human life, including unborn life, as well as those on death row.

Statistics & Other Information

1. **Georgia Statistics.** 185 death row inmates have been exonerated in the United States since 1973. In Georgia, 7 exonerations, 9 clemencies, and 76 death row inmates.³

¹ <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/pope-francis-changes-catechism-to-say-death-penalty-inadmissible>

² <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-10/fratelli-tutti-pope-fraternity-social-friendship-long-summary.html>

³ www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

2. **Deterrence of Crime.** According to a survey of the former and present presidents of the country's top academic criminological societies, 88% of these experts rejected the notion that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to murder.⁴
3. **Alternative Use for Death Penalty Funding.** Taxpayers pay for the enforcement of the death penalty – can cost \$2.5-\$3 million dollars to execute one inmate in Georgia. Using the funding allocated to the death penalty for alternative programs is sound fiscal management (\$138,000,000 estimated cost savings).⁵
4. **Public Opinion.** In a 2010 research poll, over 61% prefer some other form of punishment, other than the death penalty. A 2018 Gallup Poll showed that fewer than half of Americans believe that the death penalty is applied fairly. The number of Americans that support the death penalty is at a 40-year low. The number of Republican state lawmakers to sponsor death penalty repeal bills increased sharply since 2012. “As more Republicans consider their position on the death penalty, they realize its repeal is the pro-life thing to do.”⁶
5. **Intellectual Disabilities.** Georgia is the only state in the country that forces people to prove intellectual disability beyond a reasonable doubt to avoid execution. It is the only state that asks the jury to simultaneously decide guilt and intellectual disability. Not one person facing the death penalty has ever met the standard, which means that Georgians with intellectual disabilities are at risk for execution.
6. **Victims Denounce the Death Penalty.** Victims' families are calling for an end to the death penalty. “The death penalty does not prevent violence. It does not solve crime ... It exacerbates the trauma of losing a loved one and creates yet another grieving family. It also wastes many millions of dollars that could be better invested in programs that actually reduce crime and violence and that address the needs of families like ours.”⁷ We always pray for victims of crime and their families.

Efforts to abolish the death penalty in the United States

1. There are efforts to abolish the death penalty, but clearly, there are still states which offer this form of punishment, including Georgia. Virginia was the latest state to abolish the death penalty, and the first southern state to do so.
2. The death penalty is not a humane form of punishment, and is equal to that of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq, a barbaric form of punishment.⁸ The inmate is already serving his punishment by being incarcerated. The additional punishment of executing the person is not merciful. Why must these inmates be executed?
3. Enforcement of the death penalty is not the way of Jesus. His way, as depicted in the New Testament of the Bible, is mercy, forgiveness, and renewal of the soul. His way overturned the Old Testament teaching of an “eye-for-an-eye vengeance.”

⁴ www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

⁵ <https://gbpi.org/overview-of-georgias-2022-fiscal-year-budget/>, (<https://gbpi.org/overview-of-georgias-2022-fiscal-year-budget/>)

⁶ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/over-250-conservative-activists-sign-statement-opposing-death-penalty>, <https://s22101.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/GA1219DeathPenaltyResults.pdf>

⁷ <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/news/former-state-and-federal-judges-prosecutors-and-law-enforcement-officials-and-families-of-murder-victims-urge-federal-government-to-call-off-executions>

⁸ www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

How can our parish learn more about why the death penalty should be abolished, and why existing sentences should be commuted to Life without Parole?

1. Download printable documents from the Death Penalty Information Center online, to educate the parish on the facts surrounding this issue.⁹
2. Talk with other Catholics about respecting life from conception to natural death.
3. Learn the facts together.
4. Share the facts with others.
5. Vote your Christian conscience at the ballot box. Vote for true, practicing Christian leaders who advocate for life during all stages of life. If they say they are pro-life, ask them “What does that mean to you?”
6. Become supportive members of pro-life organizations such as Catholic Mobilizing Network¹⁰ and others
7. Learn more about Restorative Justice efforts with victims, instead of enforcing the death penalty as a solution.
8. Encourage parishes to start a letter writing campaign to their congressional representatives to end the death penalty and commute all sentences to life without parole.
9. Encourage prayers and novenas for an end to the death penalty, to commute existing sentences to life without parole.
10. Encourage prayers and novenas for the inmates, the victims and their families.

Conclusion. As a final recap, the most important reasons to repeal the Georgia death penalty law are:

Wrongful conviction leading to execution of an innocent person.

Racial bias.

Unequal justice for the accused.

The death penalty has not been proven to be a deterrent to crime.

Eliminating the death penalty is pro-life.

Millions of dollars are spent on incarcerations and lengthy appeals that should be invested in solving other crimes and investing in education to prevent crime.

It exacerbates the trauma of losing a loved one for the victim’s family over decades.

Please take action TODAY, and go to www.gacadp.org/repeal to motivate your Georgia legislators to ask for a hearing for this new bill #485, by signing the online petition. You may also contact your legislators directly by phone, email, or by using the sample letters (which you can personalize) provided at the website.

⁹ www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

¹⁰ www.catholicmobilizing.org