



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS CATHOLIC DAYS AT THE CAPITOL

DEATH PENALTY REPEAL SUPPORT: SB 938 (Farmer, Jr.); HB 6045 (Geller)

Support repeal of capital punishment in Florida.

BILL PROVISIONS:

Deletes all provisions in Florida Statutes that provide for the death penalty for capital felonies.

BACKGROUND:

In August 2018, Pope Francis directed that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* be revised to instruct the Church that, since modern penal systems have made executions unnecessary to protect society, the death penalty is inadmissible.

The default sentence in Florida for first degree murder is life without parole, which is a serious sentence that protects society without taking an additional life.

Florida is a national outlier in regards to the death penalty. Our state:

- is one of only four states that sentenced someone to death and carried out an execution in 2019,
- has exonerated more people from death row than any other state,
- maintains the country's second most populous death row, and
- imposed the highest number of death sentences last year.

RATIONALE:

The death penalty is often applied arbitrarily, disproportionately affecting the mentally ill and the poor. There is grave potential that innocents have been executed as there have already been 167 persons exonerated from death row nationwide, 29 of those in Florida.

There is no significant evidence that the death penalty deters future crime, yet there is overwhelming research that the state will have a multimillion dollar cost savings applying the alternative sentence of life in prison without parole.

A 2019 Gallup poll found that, for the first time since Gallup began asking the question in 1985, a majority of Americans (60%) chose life imprisonment as a better approach for punishing murder than the death penalty. A growing majority of people in the state and in the country prefer alternatives to this highly costly, highly ineffective, and highly flawed system.

OPPONENTS' LIKELY OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES:

OBJECTION 1: The death penalty brings closure to murder victims' family members.

RESPONSE 1: Loved ones of murder victims sometimes hope that the death penalty will bring them closure after suffering such a great loss. However, many murder victims' family members have publicly expressed that the years of litigation and uncertainty actually exacerbated their grief.

OBJECTION 2: The death penalty costs the state less than housing and feeding murderers for the rest of their lives.

RESPONSE 2: Seeking and carrying out the death penalty actually costs taxpayers millions more than it would to commute all death sentences to life in prison without parole. The most recent cost study in Florida was reported by the *Sun Sentinel* in 2000 stating that maintaining the death penalty cost Florida taxpayers \$51 million per year. More recent studies in other states have found that each capital case costs taxpayers up to \$1.5 more per case than seeking the alternative of life in prison without parole.

OBJECTION 3: The death penalty deters future crime.

RESPONSE 3: There is no significant evidence that the death penalty deters future crime. In fact, states and regions with the death penalty report higher rates of crime while those without capital punishment report lower rates of crime. Currently 21 states do not have the death penalty; an additional four states have a governor-imposed moratorium.

SPONSOR AND CO-SPONSORS:

SB 938 – Sponsor: Farmer, Jr.; Co-Sponsors: None

HB 6045 – Sponsors: Geller, Joseph; Co-Sponsors: Antone, Bush III, Davis, Eskamani, Gottlieb, Hart, Hogan Johnson, Jacquet, Mercado, Polo, Slosberg, Smith (C), Valdes, Webb

STATUS:

SB 938 – Referred to Criminal Justice; Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice; Appropriations

HB 6045 – Referred to Criminal Justice Subcommittee; Justice Appropriations Subcommittee; Judiciary Committee

For additional information, please contact --

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