



Durbin, Leahy, Booker Introduce Legislation to Ban the Death Penalty

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
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WASHINGTON—U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), and Cory Booker (D-NJ), all members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, today introduced legislation to immediately ban the use of the death penalty by the federal government. The legislation comes after Attorney General (AG) William Barr’s announcement that federal executions will resume for the first time in more than 16 years. While there have been only three federal executions in the last five decades, AG Barr has ordered the Federal Bureau of Prisons to carry out five executions in less than two months in December 2019 and January 2020.

“Try as we might, we cannot escape the fact that the death penalty in America is disproportionately imposed on minorities and poor people,” Durbin said. “Supreme Court Justices Harry Blackmun and John Paul Stevens both declared their opposition to the death penalty by the end of their judicial careers, recognizing the system to be deeply flawed. I am also struck by the revelations we have had over the last few decades that led to dozens of exonerations of innocent prisoners who had languished for years on death row, awaiting execution for crimes they didn’t commit. In light of these concerns, Illinois eliminated the state death penalty eight years ago. We should do the same at the federal level.”

“Last week I again sat down with my longtime friend, Kirk Bloodsworth. Kirk was in prison for eight years, including two on death row, before DNA evidence exonerated him. The DNA testing program named in his honor has exonerated 50 more. The death penalty fails by any objective measure. It is too final and too prone to error. It fails as a deterrent. It is racially biased. And it is beneath us as a nation,” said Leahy.

U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-07) introduced companion legislation in the House of Representatives last week.

Along with Durbin, Leahy, and Booker, the legislation is also cosponsored by Senators Kamala Harris (D-CA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and Brian Schatz (D-HI).

The death penalty is outlawed in 21 states, including Illinois, Vermont, and New Jersey. Then-Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed legislation on March 9, 2011, to abolish the death penalty in Illinois and commuted the death sentences of the fifteen inmates on Illinois' death row to life imprisonment.