



# **Durbin, Pressley, Colleagues Announce Plans to Reintroduce Bill to End Federal Death Penalty**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-07) announced that they will lead more than 70 of their colleagues to soon reintroduce the Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2021, bicameral legislation to prohibit the use of the death penalty at the federal level, and require re-sentencing of those currently on death row. The announcement comes

with three more people scheduled to be executed in the final days of the Trump Administration.

“The death penalty is deeply flawed and disproportionately imposed on Black and Brown and low-income people in America. President Trump’s resumption of the death penalty at the federal level has been a grave injustice. Shockingly, despite the fact that his presidency will end in a mere nine days, the Trump Administration plans to continue with its appalling spree of executions this week. Our bill follows the lead of 22 states, including Illinois, by finally putting an end to this failed and unjust policy. I thank Congresswoman Pressley and our colleagues who have joined us in this effort,” Durbin said.

“State-sanctioned murder is not justice, and the death penalty, which kills Black and brown people disproportionately, has absolutely no place in our society,” said Pressley. “Ending the federal death penalty—which is as cruel as it is ineffective in deterring crime—is a racial justice issue and must come to an end. We must finally abolish this inhumane form of punishment and put an end to Donald Trump’s unprecedented killing spree. I am grateful for the partnership of incoming Chairman Durbin and my colleagues in this effort.”

Despite overwhelming evidence against the death penalty, the Trump administration has executed 10 Americans since resuming federal executions for the first time in 17 years on July 14, 2020. Capital punishment is unjust, racist and defective. The United States stands alone among its peers in executing its own citizens, a barbaric punishment that denies the dignity and humanity of all people and is [disproportionately](#) applied to people who are Black, Latinx, and poor. For example, Black people make up less than 13 percent of the nation’s population while accounting for [more than 42 percent](#) of those on death row. A nationwide study found that [at least 1 in 25 people](#) sentenced to death are innocent, while [research has shown](#) that capital punishment does not deter crime.

[Polling in 2019](#) demonstrated that the majority of Americans no longer support the death penalty. Many conservative leaders have called for an end to its use because it is costly, ineffective, and inaccurate. Carrying out these executions during the pandemic has been particularly expensive, with [an estimated cost of more than \\$900,000 per execution](#).

The Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2021 would end the use of the death penalty by the federal government. Specifically, the bill would prohibit the imposition of the death penalty as punishment for any violation of federal law and would require the re-sentencing of those previously sentenced to death row. The legislation was [originally introduced by Rep. Pressley and Senator Durbin in July 2019](#) following the U. S. Department of Justice’s announcement that it would resume the use of the death penalty.

Joining Durbin and Pressley include Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Edward J. Markey (D-MA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Tina Smith (D-MN), and Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and U.S. Representatives Alma Adams (D-NC-12), Nanette Barragan (D-CA-44), Karen Bass (D-CA-37), Joyce Beatty (D-OH-03), Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA-02), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR-03), Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-01), Jamaal Bowman (D-NY-16), Anthony G. Brown (D-MD-04), Cori Bush (D-MO-01), G.K. Butterfield (D-NC-01), Katherine M. Clark (D-MA-05), Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY-09), Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO-05), Gerald Connolly (D-VA-11), Jim Cooper (D-TN-05), Danny K. Davis (D-IL-07), Madeleine Dean (D-PA-04), Diana DeGette (D-CO-01), Suzan K. DelBene (D-WA-01), Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA-11), Dwight Evans (D-PA-03), Jesus G. “Chuy” Garcia (D-IL-04), Jimmy Gomez (D-CA-34), Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL-23), Pramila Jayapal (D-WA-07), Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY-08), Hank Johnson (D-GA-04), Mondaire Jones (D-NY-17), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH-09), Ro Khanna (D-CA-17), Daniel Kildee (D-MI-05), Brenda Lawrence (D-MI-14), Barbara Lee (D-CA-13), Ted Lieu (D-CA-33), Zoe Lofgren (D-CA-19), Alan Lowenthal (D-CA-47), Tom Malinowski (D-NJ-07), Betty McCollum (D-MN-04), James P. McGovern (D-MA-02), Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY-05), Gwen Moore (D-WI-04), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14), Ilhan Omar (D-MN-05), Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ-06), Chellie Pingree (D-ME-01), Mark Pocan (D-WI-02), Jamie Raskin (D-MD-08), Bobby Rush (D-IL-01), John P. Sarbanes (D-MD-03), Mary Gay Scanlon (D-PA-05), Janice D. Schakowsky (D-IL-09), Adam Smith (D-WA-09), Abigail Spanberger (D-VA-07), Bennie G. Thompson (D-MA-02), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI-13), Lori Trahan (D-MA-03), David Trone (D-MD-06), Nydia M. Velazquez (D-NY-07), Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ-12), Peter Welch (D-VT), and Susan Wild (D-PA-07).

The Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2021 is endorsed by 242 organizations. To view the full list, click [here](#).

“We thank Rep. Pressley for reintroducing legislation to end the federal death penalty, which should have been abolished long ago,” said Lauren-Brooke Eisen, director of the Justice Program at the Brennan Center for Justice. “Capital punishment doesn’t deter violent crime, and its application is levied in a racially biased way, applied disproportionately to Black Americans. It’s time to make capital punishment a thing of the past.”

“The death penalty is a punishment with irrevocable consequences, broken beyond repair. Like the rest of the U.S. criminal legal system, it is rooted in racism dating back to slavery, Black codes, Jim Crow, and lynching, when the death penalty was used based on the race and status of people unrelated to the severity of the crime or harm done. Racial bias, sentencing of people with severe mental and intellectual disabilities, and flawed legal representation are pervasive through the federal system. The Trump

administration executed 10 people in 2020, including people with mental or intellectual disabilities despite a clear prohibition under international law. More executions are scheduled for this week. Congress can abolish the federal death penalty and this bill supports the abolition of the ultimate violation of human rights,” said Kristina Roth, the senior advocate for the Criminal Justice program at Amnesty International USA.

“Death Penalty Action was created to empower people who oppose the death penalty to take action,” said Abraham Bonowitz, Director of Death Penalty Action. “We’re honored to stand with Rep. Pressley in this struggle for true justice. Our job is to find the millions of people who agree with us and get them to do something. We want every member of Congress to hear from the voters in their district. [DeathPenaltyAction.org](https://DeathPenaltyAction.org) has the tools for citizens and communities to contact their legislator easily and effectively. It’s always a thrill when they pass your bill, so let’s get to work!”

“Human Rights Watch supports abolition of the federal death penalty through passage of H.R. 4095 because the inherent dignity of the person cannot be squared with capital punishment, which is unique in its cruelty and finality,” said Dreisen Heath of Human Rights Watch. “It is also a punishment inevitably and universally plagued with arbitrariness, racial injustice, and error.”

“The resumption of federal executions by the Trump administration flies in the face of moral values, common sense, and history,” said Peniel Ibe of the American Friends Service Committee. “The death penalty violates all religions’ basic tenets and the inherent worth of human life. Death sentences are not exempt from the grave mistakes that plague the criminal legal system and disproportionately affect communities of color. We stand with Black organizers and allies who are calling for an end to the death penalty—as well as life and long term sentences that condemn people to die in prison. American Friends Service Committee thanks Congresswoman Pressley and Senator Durbin for their leadership on this bill.”

“Our Christian faith teaches us to value all human lives without exception,” said Fr. Ted Penton, SJ of the Jesuit Conference Office of Justice & Ecology. “The death penalty is an archaic violation of human dignity. We continue to pray and advocate for its repeal both at the federal level and in all US states.”

“The death penalty is immoral, racist, and barbaric,” said Keith Swartzendruber of the National Council of Churches. “This bill provides long overdue action to end the murder of our fellow citizens and siblings created in the image of God.”

In November 2020, Durbin and Pressley, along with Leahy and Booker, [wrote](#) to Attorney General Bill Barr calling for a halt on all scheduled federal executions in the remaining days of the Trump Administration.

In December 2020, Durbin joined Warren and Booker in leading a [letter](#) to the DOJ Inspector General, seeking an investigation of the unprecedented “spree of federal executions during lame-duck period.”