

Durbin, Pressley Reintroduce Bill To End Federal Death Penalty

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA-07) today reintroduce the *Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2023*, 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 death penalty is deeply flawed and disproportionately imposed on Black and Brown and low-income people in America,” said Durbin. “Our bill follows the lead of

23 states, including Illinois, by finally putting an end to this failed and unjust policy at the federal level. I thank Congresswoman Pressley and our colleagues who are joining us in this effort.”

“State-sanctioned murder is not justice, and it’s time we abolish the cruel, racist, and fundamentally flawed death penalty that has been weaponized against Black, brown and low-income people for far too long,” said Pressley. “With momentum growing across the country, Congress must follow suit and pass our bill to end the federal death penalty once and for all. I’m grateful to Chairman Durbin and our movement partners for their continued partnership and commitment to getting this done.”

The *Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2023* 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 Durbin and Pressley in July 2019](#) following the U.S. Department of Justice’s announcement that it would resume the use of the death penalty.

In January, Durbin and Pressley submitted a [comment letter](#) in response to a Department of Justice (DOJ) Request for Information regarding the regulations governing federal executions. Their comment letter urged DOJ to rescind all of the Trump Administration’s November 27, 2020, amendments to the manner of execution regulations. These amendments allowed former Attorney General William Barr and DOJ to bypass certain regulatory steps in ordering federal executions; expand the permissible methods of execution beyond lethal injection; and authorize the use of state facilities and personnel in federal executions, among other changes. The comment letter also urged Attorney General Garland to keep in place the current moratorium on federal executions, which began on July 1, 2021, and to take the further steps of withdrawing all pending death notices and authorizing no new death notices.

Along with Durbin, the *Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2023* is cosponsored by Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA), Chris Coons (D-DE), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Tina Smith (D-MN), Ed Markey (D-MA), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Peter Welch (D-VT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Bob Casey (D-PA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Jon Ossoff (D-GA), and Cory Booker (D-NJ).

Along with Congresswoman Pressley, the *Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2023* is cosponsored by Representatives Suzanne Bonamici, John Sarbanes, James P. McGovern, Jan Schakowsky, Bonnie Watson Coleman, Julia Brownley, Rashida Tlaib, Chellie Pingree, Nikema Williams, Nanette Barragan, Dwight Evans, Eleanor Holmes

Norton, Haley Stevens, Susan Wild, Jesús G. “Chuy” García, Danny K. Davis, Betty McCollum, Cori Bush, Nydia M. Velázquez, Paul D. Tonko, David Trone, Yvette Clarke, Grace Meng, Jim Himes, Abigail Spanberger, Jimmy Gomez, Henry C. (“Hank”) Johnson, Jr., Emanuel Cleaver, Bennie Thompson, Gerald E. Connolly, Sheila Jackson Lee, Earl Blumenauer, Madeleine Dean, Becca Balint, Diana DeGette, Bobby Scott, Yvette D. Clarke, Danny K. Davis, Jan Schakowsky, Barbara Lee, Nikema Williams, Bonnie Watson Coleman, Mark Pocan, Ted Lieu, Maxwell Alejandro Frost, Ilhan Omar, Katie Porter, Mark DeSaulnier, Robert Garcia, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ro Khanna, Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, Troy Carter, Summer Lee, Frederica S. Wilson, Kevin Mullin, and Pramila Jayapal.

The *Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act of 2023* is endorsed by 415 organizations. A full list of endorsing organizations can be found [here](#).

“I have personally asked President Biden, Merrick Garland and their advisors to do everything they can to stop seeking new federal and military death sentences, commute the existing death sentences under their jurisdiction, and to order the demolition of the federal death house at Terre Haute, Indiana,” said Rev. Sharon Risher, Chairwoman of the board of directors of Death Penalty Action. “President Biden promised to abolish the federal death penalty, but he can only do it if we can get this bill passed and on to his desk, so we need everyone to get involved to help make that happen.”

“We are honored to stand with Representative Pressley and Senator Durbin in this struggle for true justice by leading the coalition of hundreds of organizations in support of this important legislation,” said Abraham Bonowitz, Director of Death Penalty Action. “Our job is to reach the millions of people who also feel that government cannot be trusted with the power to kill, and invite them to ask their members of Congress to pass this bill.”

“The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. 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. The federal death penalty is broken beyond repair with pervasive and systemic issues such as racial bias, the sentencing and execution of people with severe mental and intellectual disabilities, and flawed legal representation. Congress must abolish the federal death penalty and this bill moves the USA closer towards ending this outdated practice once and for all,” said Justin Mazzola, Researcher at Amnesty International USA.

“As Catholics who believe in the inviolability of human dignity, we understand that we can’t build a culture of life under a federal government that can put people to death,” said Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, Executive Director at Catholic Mobilizing

Network. “We support the Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act, which would eradicate this flawed and morally bankrupt system, and open up the possibility for more healing forms of justice.”

Bill text is available [here](#).