

URGENT ACTION

GOVERNOR VETOES ABOLITION OF DEATH PENALTY

On 21 June, the Governor of New Hampshire vetoed a death penalty abolition bill which would have made New Hampshire the 20th abolitionist state in the USA. Two thirds of both chambers of the legislature are required for the veto to be overridden.

On 21 June, “surrounded by law enforcement and family members of crime victims”, **Governor Chris Sununu** vetoed Senate Bill 593 which would have abolished the death penalty in New Hampshire. Two months earlier, on 26 April, the New Hampshire House of Representatives voted 223-116 in favour of Senate Bill 593, which the Senate had passed by 14 votes to 10 on 15 March.

Governor Sununu explained the reason for his veto: “Abolishing the death penalty in New Hampshire would send the wrong message, namely that New Hampshire is a place where a person who commits an unthinkable crime is guaranteed leniency. New Hampshire is not and never will be a safe haven for those who would murder a police officer, cause a death during the commission of an aggravated sexual assault or home invasion, or any other capital offense. If a person chooses to commit such an unspeakable act in our State, that person should know that a jury of their peers may elect to impose the ultimate justice. The arguments made by the proponents of this bill must give way to our obligation to support our law enforcement community, deliver justice for crime victims, and protect New Hampshire’s citizens by preserving the death penalty as the ultimate legal deterrent to the commission of heinous crimes”.

A two-thirds majority of the two chambers present and voting would be needed to override the veto. In the original vote, the Senate was two votes short of the 16 that would be needed. The House would need about 254 votes to override the veto if all 385 current representatives participated. The legislature has until the general election in November 2018 to conduct an override vote.

There is one person on New Hampshire’s death row, Michael Addison, who was sentenced to death in 2008 for the murder of a police officer, Michael Briggs, in 2006. After vetoing the bill (that would not have applied to Michael Addison’s case as it was not retroactive).

“Many murder victim family members in our state paid a very painful, harsh price for the right to tell Gov. Sununu that we don’t want killing in our name,” said New Hampshire Representative Renny Cushing, whose father was murdered in 1988. “The reality is that the death penalty does not do the one thing we wish it would do: bring our loved ones back.” Rep. Cushing and six other murder victim family members delivered a petition with 55,000 signatures in support of repeal to the governor’s office.

Efforts towards achieving an override will continue outside of the UA Network.

Many thanks to all who sent appeals. No further action by the UA Network is requested.

This is the first update to UA 84/18. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/8344/2018/en/>

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