

Testimony before the NH House Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

Thursday, January 15, 2026

Good morning, my name is Archdeacon Geoffrey Smith, I serve as Archdeacon of the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in opposition to House Bill 1730.

The Episcopal Church has long been resolved to oppose the death penalty for strong reasons, ranging from capital punishment's limited value as a deterrent, its exorbitant expense to the state in legal appeals, and to the many moral and religious proscriptions against the state taking human life. All of these arguments were considered carefully and endorsed by this body in repealing the death penalty in our state in 2019. It is our hope and prayer that this body will not return us to the dark days of state-sponsored homicide.

In this context, House Bill 1730's call to expand its application to all offenses against minors involving sexual penetration or sexual contact is abhorrent. While I can understand the society's outrage at these crimes, particularly as the revelations of the Epstein files come to light, as a survivor of child sexual abuse myself, I am deeply troubled by the idea that killing the perpetrator will give a sense of closure or satisfaction to victims or their families that justice was served. I can tell you from personal experience, it will not. No child should have to deal with the knowledge of being associated with the death of another human being.

The trauma of child sexual abuse requires both psychological and spiritual healing for the abused child, the costs of which will be much better served with aid from the state, rather than those funds being spent on legal appeals. Our Church is grounded in a faith in a merciful God for all, but especially for society's most vulnerable, our children. I implore you: the idea of reinstating and indeed expanding the death penalty in the way proposed by this bill is a morally repugnant means of accomplishing justice.

Thank you.