



January 14, 2026

NH House Criminal Justice & Safety Comm

RE: oppose all four death penalty bills, HB1749, HB1413, HB1737, HB1730

Dear Honorable Chairman Roy and members of the NH House Criminal Justice & Safety Comm,

The New Hampshire Council of Churches submits this testimony to oppose the reinstatement of the death penalty. While people of faith hold a wide range of theological perspectives, we are united in the conviction that state-sponsored killing has no place in a justice system grounded in human dignity, moral restraint, and accountability.

Faithfulness requires truth telling, calling us to be courageous. As people formed by Scripture, by conscience, and by the moral example of Jesus, we cannot turn away from legislation that attempts to bring back a practice that has no place in a state that treasures human worth and the sanctity of life.

Our concern is not rooted in crime statistics but you should know that NH's crime rates have fallen since 2016, and that states with no death penalty have equal or lower murder rates than states with the death penalty. This is not where our argument begins. The Council's opposition begins with Jesus himself who repeatedly ministered that divine justice is not built on fear, retaliation, or vengeance. It is built on transformation.

Jesus explicitly replaces "an eye for an eye" with "do not resist an evil person." His instruction is not simply a private spiritual lesson. It reveals an entirely different vision for how human beings are meant to treat one another when harm has occurred. The New Testament reframes justice around restoration, not retribution. It asks us to tell the truth, to hold people accountable, to seek repair, and to create the conditions for repentance and healing. Execution prevents any of this. It shuts the door that God, through Jesus, told us to keep open.

Scriptures challenge us with uncomfortable clarity. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." These words remind us that when we presume the authority to make final decisions about the worth of any human life, we risk losing sight of our own frailty. To our Libertarian siblings, while we come from different vantage points, we are aligned on opposing the state to determine who lives and who dies. Execution is the ultimate expression of empire. Jesus's ministry opposed empire because empire claimed powers that belong to God alone. As such, the Council rejects the claim of the bills' sponsors seeking to re-instate lethal authority.

When Jesus says, "Let he who is without sin be the first to throw a stone," he was not offering a metaphor, he was stopping an execution. He upended the logic that violence creates justice.

Human courts sometimes shed innocent blood. Modern experience confirms that convictions are often incorrect and that our systems fail in ways that cannot be undone. Scripture tells us, "[God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." If this patience reflects the heart of God, it must also shape the work of God's people. The death penalty denies the possibility of repentance, and, worse, it presumes a perfection in earthly judgment that we simply do not have.

We know the deep anguish that comes when lives are taken through violence. We know the tears of families who will never again hold the people they love. Opposition to the death penalty is not a dismissal of grief or punishment. ***It is a refusal to compound it.*** Jesus teaches, "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" Mercy is not weakness. It is moral strength. It is the discipline of refusing to mirror the very harm we condemn.

We do not need to agree on every point of theology to agree that the state's return to killing people moves New Hampshire farther from safety, holiness, and wholeness.

Jesus, a beacon of light, his greatest, most numerous commandment was for us to love one another and to be generously merciful.

In faith and service,

Lisa D. Beaudoin, Executive Director, NH Council of Churches