

An Open Letter From 1981-Era Ohio Legislators
WHO, AS MEMBERS OF THE 114TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY,
WERE AMONG THE “ARCHITECTS” OF THE
CURRENT OHIO DEATH PENALTY LAW

To The

OHIO SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Nathan Manning (Chair), Michele Reynolds (Vice Chair), Paula Hicks-Hudson
(Ranking Member), Louis Blessing, III, Al Cutrona, Theresa Gavarone, and Kent
Smith

IN SUPPORT OF
SENATE BILL 133
Repealing Ohio’s Death Penalty

OCTOBER 2025

We, the undersigned, served in the 114th General Assembly, during which the House and Senate debated and ultimately enacted Ohio’s death penalty law, S.B. 1, effective October 19, 1981.

As legislators, we had dedicated ourselves to improving Ohio’s criminal justice system. The United States Supreme Court had struck down our 1974-era death penalty law as unconstitutional in 1978, and over the next three years we debated at length whether to re-enact capital punishment in Ohio. After a number of close committee votes, a majority in both chambers approved S.B. 1.

Forty-four years later, we add our names to our esteemed 114th Assembly legislative colleagues who have urged repeal of the death penalty law we all once wrote:

---Former Governor Bob Taft, and former Attorneys General Jim Petro and Lee Fisher urged repeal in a March 2021 *Columbus Dispatch* opinion column “[Former governor, attorneys general: Ohio death penalty broken, costly, and unjust. It must be repealed](#)”.

---Principal architect of S.B. 1 and former Ohio Supreme Court Justice Paul Pfeifer wrote a 2011 opinion column “[Retire Ohio’s Death Penalty](#)” in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and so testified to this body. Justice Pfeifer affirmed the need for repeal in a 2019 *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* article, “[Ohio’s Modern Death Penalty - From Architect to Opponent](#)”.

We share their views regarding the death penalty system’s inordinate costs, diverting public resources that could be better spent supporting victims’ families and preventing crime. We share their concern about its uneven application that produces racial and geographic inequities in our justice system. And we share their concern that this death penalty system has made mistakes and cannot be trusted to mete out a penalty so irrevocable.

In short, we understand this broken death penalty system’s grievous flaws, its unintended consequences, and its failure to achieve the benefits we had intended.

While some of us opposed enactment of the death penalty in 1981 and others of us supported it, today we are united in our belief that it is time to retire Ohio’s death penalty.

We ask members of the 136th General Assembly to enact Senate Bill 133 and

REPEAL THE DEATH PENALTY LAW that we of the 114th General Assembly wrote, making life imprisonment without parole Ohio's most severe penalty.

SIGNERS:

REPRESENTATIVES:

Eugene Branstool (1st Dist.)
Jim Petro (3rd Dist.)
Ken Rocco (7th Dist.)
Edna Deffler (12th Dist.)
Lee Fisher (16th Dist.)
Jeff Dean (17th Dist.)
Leslie Brown (29th Dist.)
Mike Stinziano (30th Dist.)
Benny Bonanno (35th Dist.)
Pete Crossland (42nd Dist.)
Joseph Vukovich (52nd Dist.)
Ed Hughes (59th Dist.)
David Hartley (60th Dist.)
John A. Begala (62nd Dist.)
Jim Zehner (63rd Dist.)
Waldo (Ben) Rose (64th Dist.)
Tom Fries (71st Dist.)
Dennis Wojtanowski (74th Dist.)
Charles (Rocky) Saxbe (75th Dist.)
Chuck Earl (82nd Dist.)
Ron James (92nd Dist.)
Tom Johnson (95th Dist.)

SENATORS:

Neal Zimmers (5th Dist.)
Chuck Curran (6th Dist.)
Marigene Valiquette (11th Dist.)
Steve Maurer (12th Dist.)
Charles L. Butts (23rd Dist.)

[Note: Sadly, over half the members of the 114th General Assembly have passed away. Fifteen surviving members could not be reached; a handful of the surviving members who were contacted declined to sign. This list was initially compiled in 2021; since then, Senators Marigene Valiquette and Steve Maurer have passed away.]