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U.S. President Donald Trump holds a Cabinet meeting at the White House in Washington Aug. 26, 2025. Trump said during the meeting that capital punishment will be sought for all murders in Washington. (OSV News/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)

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President Donald Trump said at an Aug. 26 Cabinet meeting that capital punishment will be sought for all murders in Washington, D.C.

Trump's comments came amid his federalization of the police force in the nation's capital and after he activated the National Guard in what he called an effort to combat crime in Washington.

"Anybody murders something in the capital: capital punishment," Trump said at the White House meeting. "Capital: capital punishment. If somebody kills somebody in the capital, Washington, D.C., we're going to be seeking the death penalty."

Trump argued the policy was "preventative," a claim disputed by death penalty opponents.

"Perpetuating more violence in response to harm does not promise safety or an effective solution to crime," Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, a group that advocates for the abolition of capital punishment in line with Catholic teaching, told OSV News.

Vaillancourt Murphy said the District of Columbia like other major metropolitan areas "has challenges with crime and violence that should not be ignored." But she said that to respond with capital punishment is "at best a terribly misguided approach."

She said capital punishment "defiles the sacred dignity of life and deserves no place in our nation’s capital, our country, or any society."

"Simply put, the death penalty is a failed system beyond repair," she said. "Instead of providing real opportunities for healing and closure, capital punishment systematically perpetuates a cycle of violence."

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Among the first actions of his second term earlier this year, Trump signed an executive order directing the U.S. attorney general to "pursue the death penalty for all crimes of a severity demanding its use," and to "seek the death penalty regardless of other factors for every federal capital crime" that involves the "murder of a law-enforcement officer" or a "capital crime committed by an alien illegally present in this country."

Vaillancourt Murphy noted that "practically speaking, capital punishment is more expensive than other prison sentences and it is often applied arbitrarily."

She pointed to information from the Death Penalty Information Center showing that at least 200 people — or one person for every eight persons executed since 1973 — have been wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death.

"For every eight people executed in the United States, one person has been exonerated. Additionally, the death penalty is not an effective deterrent to crime," she said. "Research has consistently demonstrated that murder rates are lower in states that do not have the death penalty."

"The people of Washington, D.C., deserve real safety, true accountability, and approaches to crime and violence that are rooted in the preservation of life," she said.

The Catholic Church's official magisterium opposes the use of the death penalty as inconsistent with the inherent sanctity of human life, and advocates for the practice's abolition worldwide.

The late Pope Francis revised the Catechism of the Catholic Church in 2018 to clarify the church's teaching that capital punishment is morally "inadmissible" in the modern world and that the church works with determination for its abolishment worldwide.

In his 2020 encyclical Fratelli Tutti, Francis addressed the moral problem of capital punishment by citing St. John Paul II, writing that his predecessor "stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice."

About a decade prior to becoming Pope Leo XIV earlier this year, then-Bishop Robert Prevost wrote in a March 5, 2015, post on X, then known as Twitter, "It's time to end

the death penalty."

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.