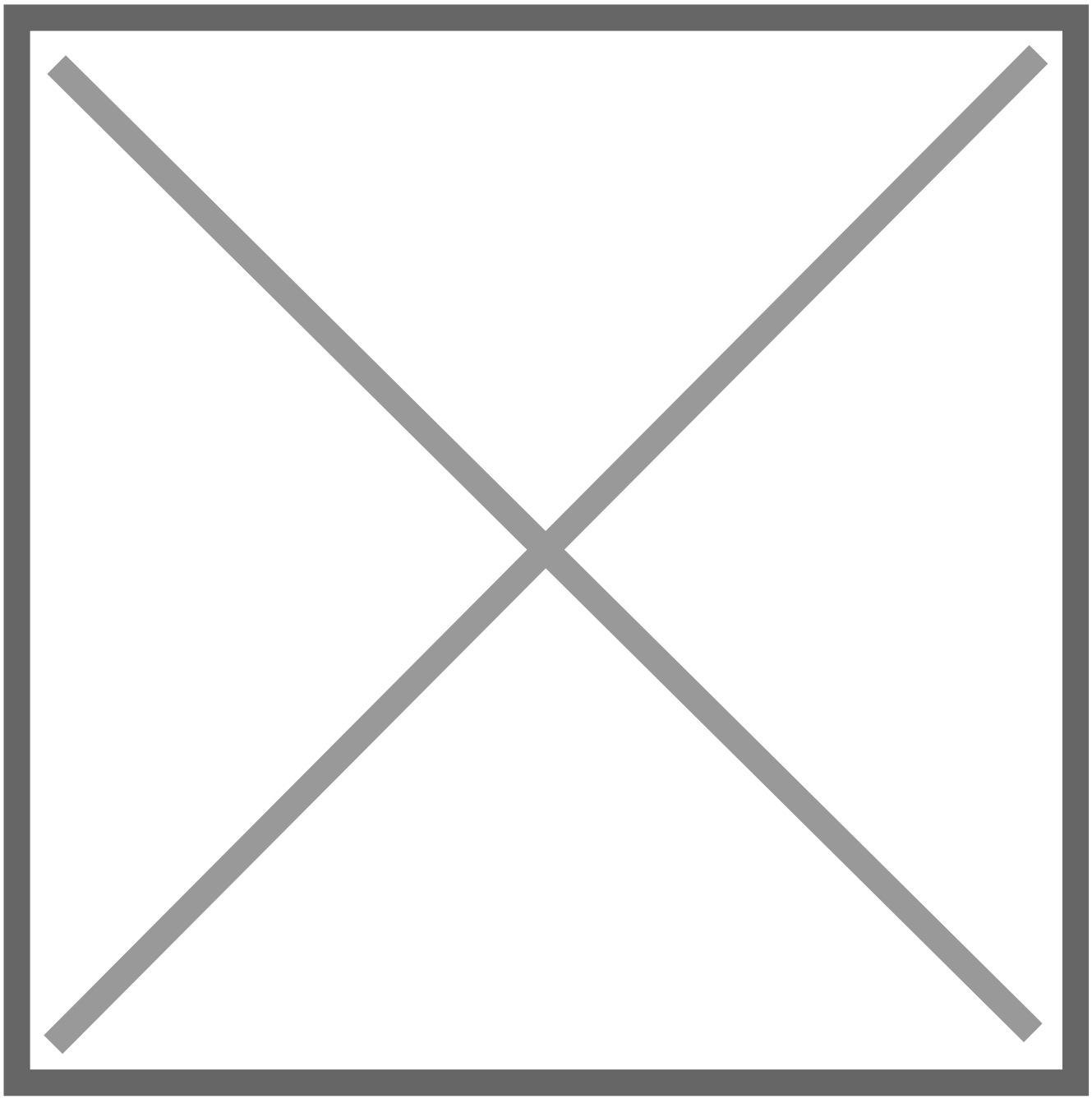
News



A lethal injection chamber at Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla, Wash., is seen Sept. 6, 2024, in this file photo. As Ohio prepares for its upcoming gubernatorial election in 2026, faith leaders pushed lawmakers on May 4, 2026, to end the practice of capital punishment. (OSV News/Reuters/Matt Mills McKnight)

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Columbus, Ohio — May 5, 2026
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As Ohio prepares for its upcoming gubernatorial election, faith leaders pushed lawmakers on May 4 to end the practice of capital punishment.

Ohio's May 5 primary election will determine who both major parties will nominate to run in the state's November gubernatorial election to succeed Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican whose term ends in January.

DeWine, who has thus far declined to state his position on capital punishment outright, has indicated he would do so after the primary elections. DeWine has postponed every execution since he took office in 2019. The last execution in Ohio was in 2018, before DeWine took office.

But opponents of the practice hope DeWine would support their effort to end capital punishment in his final months in office.

Kevin Werner, executive director of Ohioans to Stop Executions, said at a May 4 press conference that the issue was "clearly on his mind."

"We're eagerly anticipating what the governor is going to say," he said.

Werner said a letter to lawmakers, also sent to DeWine, from faith leaders urging lawmakers to end the practice had more than 500 signatories. That letter included Catholic clergy, deacons, and religious sisters.

Marsha Forson, associate director of social concerns for the Catholic Conference of Ohio, said at the press conference that the Easter season, which the Church is still celebrating, is a time to reflect on "the real capacity for conversion and repentance."

Pointing to a recent video from Pope Leo XIV marking 15 years since the abolition of the death penalty in his home state of Illinois, Forson said the pontiff spoke about how "the dignity of the person is not lost, even after very serious crimes are committed."

Forson stressed that while the Church teaches that in order to protect the common good, lawful public authority can impose punishments that protect citizens, but "but at the same time, do not completely deprive those who are guilty of the possibility of redemption."

Meanwhile, as death penalty opponents await an official position from DeWine before he leaves office next year, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost has pushed to end the state's unofficial moratorium on executions, arguing in an April statement that not carrying out those sentences makes "a mockery of the justice system and of the dead and their families."

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But Rich Nathan, founding pastor of the Protestant church Vineyard Columbus, argued for an end to the death penalty at the May 4 press conference, appealing "especially to people, whether religious or not, who consider themselves pro-life." Nathan noted that his organization has a large pro-life ministry that helps women and families facing unplanned pregnancies.

Data shows the death penalty is not carried out in the U.S. "in a consistent, more principled way," he argued.

"It does not simply track the severity of crime; it often depends on where the crime took place, how the prosecutor handles the case, and whether the defendant had the resources for a strong legal defense," Nathan said. "Our justice system cannot reliably deliver an absolutely perfect verdict, and that's what's needed when we take a human life. In matters of life and death, good enough is not good enough. For these reasons, I want to urge the legislature to abolish capital punishment in the state of Ohio, and I speak as a pro-life Christian."

The Catholic Church's official magisterium opposes the use of capital punishment 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."