News

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine attends Day One of the Republican National Convention at the Fiserv

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine attends Day One of the Republican National Convention at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee July 15, 2024. During a June 16, 2026, press conference, DeWine announced opposition to the death penalty. (OSV News/Reuters/Callaghan O'Hare)

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Gov. Mike DeWine announced June 16 his opposition to capital punishment, as Catholic opponents of the practice urged him to end the practice in the state before he leaves office.

During his time in the U.S. House and Senate, DeWine supported legislation that expanded the use of the death penalty, and as a previous attorney general in Ohio, he oversaw capital cases. But DeWine has postponed every execution since he took office as governor in 2019.

"I believed that in some cases capital punishment could serve as a deterrent to keep some people from killing," DeWine, who is Catholic, said at a press conference. "For me, it was the moral justification for having a death penalty."

"It is impossible today to make the case that the death penalty is a deterrent," DeWine continued. "I no longer believe the death penalty is a deterrent to murder."

He argued, "The most effective thing to deal with violent crime is to go after the repeat violent offenders and lock them the hell up, that's what's effective."

Opponents of the practice have pushed DeWine, a Republican whose term ends in January, to support their effort to end capital punishment in the state during his final months in office.

Brian Hickey, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio, said in a June 16 statement that DeWine "is correct that Ohio should not kill human beings, given the flawed system of execution."

"Ohioans are increasingly recognizing that the death penalty perpetuates a cycle of violence, deprives offenders of rehabilitation, and increases costs to the state," he said. "We appreciate Governor DeWine highlighting the role of state employees who must execute a fellow human. Such a task, even in a volunteer role, is unnatural and immoral as employees must strap up a defenseless human being and force them to take their last breath."

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Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, a group that advocates for the abolition of capital punishment in line with Catholic teaching, said in a statement DeWine's "call for the abolishment of capital punishment in Ohio is an encouraging sign and reflects growing recognition that the state can move toward a more just and life-affirming approach."

"There currently are 114 individuals on death row in Ohio," she said. Throughout his term, Governor DeWine has upheld a moratorium on executions. I am so "grateful for his dedicated leadership and conviction on this pro-life issue."

The state's previous attorney general, Dave Yost, 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." In a June 17 statement, Ohio Attorney General Andy Wilson said state law currently permits the practice.

"I understand that the Governor issued a statement indicating his opposition to the death penalty," Wilson said. "The governor is a religious man who cares deeply about the sanctity of life. His opinion reflects his lifetime of working in the criminal justice system and serving the people of Ohio."

Wilson added, "While I respect his opinion, each Ohioan is entitled to their own view on this issue, and I'm certain that those opinions would vary greatly on whether we should or should not have the death penalty."

"Having personally handled several death penalty trials, I understand the value of the death penalty as an option for prosecutors and victims in very limited circumstances," he said. "The decision to seek the death penalty is the most serious decision a prosecutor can make. My experience working with prosecutors across the state is that they do not make this choice lightly."

But Vaillancourt Murphy and Hickey each urged DeWine to take further steps in his remaining time in office.

"Governor DeWine is a Catholic whose faith has always inspired his public service," Vaillancourt Murphy said. "As fellow Catholics who advocate for the dignity of every human life, we urge him to go further and grant clemency to those on Ohio's death row. The time to act is now.

Hickey argued, "Eliminating the state's ability to kill citizens is not a partisan issue."

"More and more Republicans support the State of Ohio removing the death penalty due to their Christian faith or understanding the flawed practice of a state's human execution system," he said. "As Governor DeWine noted convincingly, the death penalty does not serve as a deterrent to the unacceptable violence we witness in Ohio's communities."

"We join Governor DeWine," he concluded, "in urging Ohio legislators to pass House Bill 72 and Senate Bill 134 to prohibit the State of Ohio from funding the intentional termination of human life -- including abortion, assisted suicide, and State-sanctioned execution -- and to abolish the death penalty in favor of life without parole."