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Ohio's bishops urge end to death penalty

by Reginald Fields by The Plain Dealer

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- The Catholic bishops of Ohio are calling on Gov. John Kasich and state lawmakers to abolish the state's death penalty.

The bishops said they concur with recent comments by Ohio Supreme Court Justice Paul Pfeifer, who charged the state's capital punishment law is discriminatory and applied unevenly and should be replaced with a penalty of life in prison without parole. Ohio in recent years has executed more death row inmates than any state except Texas.

"Just punishment can occur without resorting to the death penalty. Our church teachings consider the death penalty to be wrong in all cases," the 10 bishops said in a statement issued Friday (Feb. 4).

"Life imprisonment respects the moral view that all life, even that of the worst offender, has value and dignity."

Pfeifer, a Republican, helped write the 1981 law that instituted the death penalty, but said the safeguards he and other lawmakers put in place at the time to prevent inequities have not worked. He called the use of capital punishment a "lottery."

"It has bothered me from the beginning," Pfeifer told reporters on Jan. 19.

Kasich, also a Republican, responded swiftly to Pfeifer's comments, saying through a spokesman he supports the death penalty.

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