

PUBLIC

AI Index: AMR 51/59/00

EXTRA 37/00

Death penalty

14 April 2000

USA (New Hampshire) Bill to abolish the death penalty

On 9 March 2000, the New Hampshire House of Representatives voted 191-163 to abolish the death penalty. If the bill is approved by the Senate, it would then have to be passed to the Governor before becoming law.

A hearing on the bill (House Bill 1548) before the Senate Judiciary Committee is scheduled for 24 April. The vote by the Committee and then by the Senate as a whole is likely to take place within two to three weeks of the hearing.

On 8 March, the eve of the House vote, Governor Jeanne Shaheen stated that she would veto the bill if it passed both chambers of the legislature.

New Hampshire currently has no prisoners on death row. It reintroduced the death penalty in 1991. No executions have been carried out in the state since 1939.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Recent months have seen increased calls for a moratorium on executions in the USA. Added impetus to such calls came with the decision, on 31 January 2000, by the Governor of Illinois to suspend executions in his state due to its "shameful" record on wrongful convictions. Since then, two more former death row inmates have been acquitted of the crime for which they were sentenced to die, one in Missouri, and one in Florida.

While the risk to the innocent is currently fuelling many of the calls for executions to be halted, and is itself reason enough to abolish the death penalty, it is important that the other injustices of the death penalty are not forgotten -- including its inherent cruelty, the arbitrariness of its imposition and its disproportionate use against the poor and minorities.

Amnesty International believes that the only solution for the death penalty is its abolition. It supports a moratorium as a first step to this end, not as a temporary halt by legislators attempting to "fix" an unfixable punishment. A vote for abolition in New Hampshire would be a courageous act of leadership and an important signal to other states that the time has come to consign the death penalty to the history books.

One hundred and eight countries -- more than half -- are abolitionist in law or practice. The USA has executed 626 prisoners since reintroducing the death penalty in 1977, including 28 this year.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send e-mails/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language, in your own words:

To Governor: Urging her not to veto House Bill 1548 should the Senate pass it, but to support abolition of the death penalty in New Hampshire.

To Senators: Urging them to support House Bill 1548;

- in all appeals please use your own wording as to why you believe New Hampshire should abolish the death penalty.

APPEALS TO:

The Honourable Jeanne Shaheen
Governor of New Hampshire

Office of the Governor
State House, Concord, NH 03301-4990, USA
Tel: + 1 603 271 2121
Faxes: + 1 603 271 6998
Emails: jshaheen@shaheen.org
Telegrams: Governor Shaheen, Concord, New Hampshire, USA
Salutation: Dear Governor

If possible, please copy letters to the Governor to: Senate President, Beverly Hollingworth (see address below) and Speaker of the House, Donna Sytek, State House, Concord, NH 03301, USA; Fax: +1 603 271 3309

If possible, please also send separate appeals to one or more of the following:

Senator Debra Pignatelli
Chair of Senate Judiciary Committee
22 Appletree Green
Nashua, NH 03062, USA
Faxes: + 1 603 271 2105
Salutation: Dear Senator Pignatelli

Senator Rick Trombly (Judiciary Committee)
23 Tremont Street
Boscawen, NH 03303-1325, USA
E-mails: ratrombly@aol.com
Faxes: + 1 603 271 2105
Salutation: Dear Senator Trombly

Senator Richard Russman
18 Beach Drive
Kingston, NH 03848, USA
Faxes: + 1 603 271 2105
Salutation: Dear Senator Russman

Senate President Beverly Hollingworth
State House
Concord, NH 03301, USA
E-mails: beverly.hollingworth@leg.state.nh.us
Faxes: + 1 603 271 2105
Salutation: Dear Senate President

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of USA accredited to your country.

You may also send brief letters (not more than 250 words) to:

Letters to the Editor, *The Portsmouth Herald*,
111 Maplewood Avenue, Portsmouth, NH 03801, USA
Faxes: + 1 603 427 0550
E-mails: pherald@aol.com

Letters to the Editor, *Union Leader*,
100 William Loeb Drive, P.O. Box 95555
Manchester, NH 03108-9555, USA
Faxes: + 1 603 668 0382

Letters to the Editor, *Concord Monitor*
One Monitor Drive

Concord, New Hampshire 03302-1177, USA

E-mails: letters@cmonitor.com

Faxes: +1 603 224 8120

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 May 2000.