



Statement by Bishop Burbidge and Bishop Knestout on Passage of Death Penalty Abolition Legislation

February 5, 2021

Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of the Diocese of Arlington and Bishop Barry C. Knestout of the Diocese of Richmond issued the following statement on passage of death penalty abolition legislation:

“We welcome today’s vote by the Virginia House of Delegates to abolish the death penalty, as well as the vote by the Virginia Senate to do so earlier this week.

“We offer – and affirm the utmost need for – prayerful support for the families of victims of horrific crimes. We also affirm, with clarity and conviction, the words of the [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#): ‘[T]he death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person’ (no. 2267).

“The same paragraph of the *Catechism* also notes, ‘[T]here is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes.’ We see this increasing awareness at work in the many voices that joined together to advocate for this legislation, and ultimately in the votes by the Senate and House in favor of ending the death penalty in Virginia, which has executed more people than any other state.

“In the words of Pope Francis, ‘Indeed, nowadays the death penalty is unacceptable, however grave the crime of the convicted person. It is an offence to the inviolability of life and to the dignity of the human person; it likewise contradicts God’s plan for individuals and society, and his merciful justice’ (Remarks to 6th World Congress against the Death Penalty, June 2016). As [Pope Francis](#), [his predecessors](#) and the [U.S. Catholic bishops](#) have consistently noted, we have other ways to provide punishment and protect society, without resorting to executions. We too have been consistently clear in our stand on the abolition legislation this year and on similar legislation in years past, and in our direct interventions before executions occurred in Virginia and at the federal level.”

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