



Statement by Bishop Burbidge and Bishop Knestout on Governor Northam's Signature of Legislation Abolishing Virginia's Death Penalty

March 24, 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 Governor Northam's signature of legislation abolishing Virginia's death penalty:

“Today, Governor Ralph Northam signed into law SB 1165/HB 2263, making Virginia the first southern state, and the 23rd state overall, to end its death penalty. Looking back, we sadly reflect on our Commonwealth's disturbing and tragic history of executions – carried out more frequently here than in any other state in our country's history. As we move forward, we embrace this hope-filled new beginning. As Pope Francis states, ‘The firm rejection of the death penalty shows to what extent it is possible to recognize the inalienable dignity of every human being and to accept that he or she has a place in this universe’ (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 269). Through our Virginia Catholic Conference, we supported this historic legislation as it progressed through the General Assembly because all human life is sacred. We are grateful to those who worked to make this a reality.

Our dioceses also continue our prayers for families of victims of horrific crimes and renew our commitment to provide for their pastoral support. We stand ready to accompany them in their journey to find healing and peace.”

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