

Beat: Politics

Maryland Leaders Anxious to Repeal Death Penalty Law

Senate President predicts quick passage

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USPA NEWS - Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley(D) told Maryland lawmakers during committee hearings on Thursday that the death penalty is expensive to administer, not an effective deterrent, and at odds with "our values as a people."

O'Malley appeared before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and then the House Judiciary Committee in support of the legislation he is sponsoring that would replace the death penalty with life in prison without the possibility of parole.

The governor was the lead-off witness at a packed hearing on one of the most high-profile issues facing the General Assembly this session. Senators were prepared to hear hours of testimony from both sides, including several law enforcement officers who argue that the death penalty should be available for egregious murder cases.

Making his first appearance at a legislative hearing, Archbishop William E. Lori of the Archdiocese of Baltimore offered testimony before both committee's, stating that "As bishops of the United States we oppose capital punishment not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes, but for what it does to all of us as a society"; We cannot overcome crime by simply executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life."

Before the hearings commenced on Thursday, Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. (D-Calvert) told reporters that he predicts a bill will pass his chamber "with a comfortable margin." A vote could come by the end of the month.

Advocates say they are also optimistic about securing enough votes in the House of Delegates.

In recent years, the bill has died in the Judicial Proceedings Committee. But this session, Miller has pledged to allow the bill to be considered by the full chamber if O'Malley can demonstrate he has enough votes for passage.

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