

Execution wrong no matter the method, says Ohio Catholic official

COLUMBUS, Ohio - When Ohio inmate Kenneth Biros was executed Dec. 8 with a one-drug lethal injection - the first person in the U.S. to be executed in this manner - the Ohio Catholic Conference did not specifically address the execution but instead reiterated the church's opposition to all means of capital punishment.

"The death penalty is wrong no matter what you use" to carry it out, Carolyn Jurkowitz, executive director of the Ohio Catholic Conference, told Catholic News Service Dec. 9.

The U.S. Supreme Court rejected Biros' final appeals the day of his execution. The 51-year-old inmate was executed by one lethal injection, instead of the three-drug cocktail used in all other states, because Ohio adopted this execution method after a failed attempt to execute Romell Broom in mid-September.

Prison authorities spent more than two hours trying to find a usable vein in Broom, 53, convicted of the 1984 abduction, rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl.

Death penalty opponents have argued that while they object to capital punishment taking place at all, at least the single drug is more humane than the three-drug cocktail, which involves a short-acting barbiturate that makes the inmate unconscious, followed by a paralytic and then a chemical to stop the heart.

Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland stopped Broom's botched execution and issued a one-week reprieve that has been extended. A federal judge was to begin hearing arguments Dec. 9 concerning the state's constitutional grounds to carry out a second execution attempt on Broom. His attorneys have called what happened to him "inhuman and barbarous."

Biros was convicted of sexually assaulting and killing Tami Engstrom, 22, in Ohio in 1991.

He was the fourth person to be executed in Ohio this year and the 33rd in the state

to die since Ohio resumed capital punishment in 1999. With each execution that takes place in the state, the Ohio Catholic Conference, through one of its bishops, submits a letter to the governor asking for clemency. The Catholic conference is the public policy arm of the state's bishops.

Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati sent a letter to the Ohio governor Nov. 18 asking him to "stop this lethal form of punishment," referring to the one-drug method.

"Ohio has spent the past several months figuring out how to kill another person more efficiently," he wrote, noting that the state "will lead the country in experimenting with the new one-drug method of lethal injection."

"What a shameful legacy for our state: pursuing the slippery slope of 'humane' death," he added.

Archbishop Pilarczyk noted that the state's bishops have consistently advocated for an end to the death penalty, saying they believe this form of punishment is unnecessary and systemically flawed.

He expressed his condolences and pledged his prayers to the family and friends of Engstrom and victims of "all violent and senseless crimes" as well as prayers for Biros and his family and friends.

News reports of Biros' execution said the inmate received Communion prior to his execution and described himself as being "paroled to my Father in heaven."

"I'm sorry from the bottom of my heart," he said after thanking his family and friends for their support.