

MCC: Not surprised referendum effort on death penalty repeal failed

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The Maryland Catholic Conference called the failure of recent efforts to bring the state's new death penalty repeal law to public vote "a great relief," as it means the measure will stand and the organization will not have to expend resources fighting a referendum.

Mary Ellen Russell, MCC executive director, said she was not surprised petitioners were unable to gather enough signatures to meet the State Board of Election's quota by deadline.

"There's never been a groundswell of opposition to repeal," she said. "We firmly believe that most Marylanders favor the penalty of life without parole instead of the death penalty."

The Maryland Secretary of State requires more than 55,000 valid signatures petitioning a law to referendum for it to be added to a ballot. Petitioners were required to file more than 18,000 signatures by May 31. If that quota was met, petitioners would have been required to file another 37,000 signatures by June 30.

Led by Maryland Del. Neil Parrott (R-Washington County), repeal opponents gathered more than 15,000 signatures, falling short of the quota. A similar effort to bring the state's new gun control law to referendum also failed.

Maryland's Catholic bishops have been longtime supporters of death penalty repeal. The Maryland General Assembly passed a bill to repeal the state's death penalty during the 2013 legislative session. Gov. Martin J. O'Malley signed the bill into law May 2.

The MCC advocates for public policy on behalf of the state's bishops.

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Also see:

After decades of Catholic activism, death penalty repeal becomes law in Maryland