

Statement by Richard O'Leary, 33-year veteran of Manchester Police Dept.

My name is Richard O'Leary and I spent 33 years at the Manchester Police Department, retiring as Deputy Chief of the Investigative Unit. I worked at Westbridge Inc. for one year with clients who had a dual diagnosis of Mental Illness and substance abuse. I was also the Assistant Director of the Hillsborough County Re-Entry Program for 3 years, helping individuals released from State prison transition back into society helping them find jobs, housing, and needed services.

I have a son who is currently serving as a Manchester police officer.



We do not need the death penalty to preserve public safety in NH. One of the most oft-cited claims about the death penalty is that it deters murderers and therefore makes us safer. Over 200 studies to date fail to support that claim. Individuals that commit murders often do so under the influence of drugs, exacerbated by mental health issues, and without forethought. Those that do plan murders never believe they'll be caught. Since we have not executed anyone here since 1939, and since NH has one of the lowest murder rates in the country, the claim that the death penalty is deterring anyone here is simply not credible. In southern states that account for over 80% of the executions, you will find the highest murder rates. Across the US, states without the death penalty in fact have the lowest murder rates.

The truth is, the sentence of life in prison without parole – perhaps you could even call it “death in prison,” after spending decades in a 6 x 10' cell with your freedom forever gone – is a sentence that protects public safety and provides a harsh punishment. It also allows for the possibility of rehabilitation and redemption.

Gov. Sununu is telling us that his opposition to repealing the death penalty is based on his support of law enforcement. Given the facts I have just outlined, I fail to see how spending over 5 1/2 million dollars to date on a single death penalty case in any way supports our hard-working police officers in their day-to-day challenges. Here are some ways that we could use that money more effectively:

First, funding treatment centers for drug and alcohol rehabilitation—actually helping individuals with substance and mental health issues – would greatly benefit the officers on the streets by treating the problem at the source. This has the added benefit of protecting the general public.

Second, our court system is currently woefully understaffed and underfunded. The same goes for the Attorney Generals' office. This is widely known but no one is doing anything about it. Can a government that is not supporting its judicial system claim to support law enforcement? Not credibly.

Third, money could be directed to solving NH's 120 cold cases, which would help bring closure to all of those victim family members. Our cold case unit simply cannot solve these murders with their current level of funding. Why should these families matter less?

Fourth, our prisons are also understaffed and underfunded. Perhaps some of these funds that we're spending to kill a prisoner could instead be used to add staff, training and education to our prison system. This would further ensure the safety of our Correctional Officers and Inmates within the system.

Fifth, funds could be used to bolster police training, in the area of firearms, search and seizure, conflict de-escalation, and many others – these require regular ongoing training but the money for these is rarely available.

Finally, Domestic Violence and Victim Advocates that work with victims of crimes would benefit from more funding. Victim family members could also benefit, through counseling and restitution for lost income when their loved ones are murdered. Regardless of what you believe about the death penalty, what does it say about us when we are willing to spend millions trying to execute a single perpetrator, while at the same time doing so little for victims?

Governor Sununu, these are some of the ways that you can show your support of law enforcement and enhance public safety at the same time – ways that will make a difference, on the ground, with real people, dealing with real challenges. I certainly believe that such actions would benefit my son who is serving with the Manchester Police.

Governor Sununu, the NH Senate and House of Representatives have spoken clearly that they do not support the Death Penalty in NH. They have heard the testimonies and are strong supporters of Law Enforcement, yet they voted to repeal the Death Penalty. I am respectfully asking that you not veto this bill and continue to support ALL of law enforcement in their mission through some of the concrete actions I have outlined.

Thank you.