

Top Utah House Republicans oppose repealing the death penalty, but say it deserves debate

KUER 90.1

By [Sonja Hutson](#)

February 4, 2022

<https://www.kuer.org/politics-government/2022-02-04/top-utah-house-republicans-oppose-repealing-the-death-penalty-but-say-it-deserves-debate>

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Things aren't looking too promising for the effort by civil liberties groups, prosecutors and some GOP lawmakers to repeal the death penalty in Utah.

During a meeting with reporters Friday, the top two House Republicans said they were not in favor of a bill to eliminate it.

House Majority Leader Mike Schultz, R-Hooper, said the death penalty goes to the state's worst criminals and he wouldn't want to take that away.

House Speaker Brad Wilson, R-Kaysville, did say the bill, [H.B. 147](#), would still get a committee hearing, though.

Senate President Stuart Adams, R-Layton, said he's been opposed to it but now has an open mind.

“I'm starting to see a little bit of both sides of this issue,” he said. “I'm concerned for the families of the victims that have gone through that death row process, along with the perpetrators.”

Still, the top two House Republicans publicly disapproving of the legislation doesn't bode well for its chance to pass.

The ACLU of Utah's Marina Lowe said she's glad the bill will at least get a public hearing.

“The time is right to do right by our criminal justice system to use our money more efficiently, to make sure that we aren't asking our victims to endure decades of appeals, of unwanted media attention,” she said.

Utah has not executed anyone since 2010. About [half of the country's states](#) have abolished capital punishment.

[Utah County repealed its death penalty](#) in October.

This marks the third time in the past five years lawmakers have introduced legislation to prohibit the use of capital punishment statewide. In 2016, former Republican Sen. Steve Urquhart sponsored a similar bill that came close to passing. In 2018, another bill was introduced by former Republican Rep. Gage Froerer.