# Tennessee Governor Signs Death Penalty Law for Child Rape Convictions



### Tennessee Governor Approves Death Penalty Law for Child Rape Convictions

Tennessee Governor Bill Lee has signed a new law allowing the death penalty for certain child rape convictions. The legislation, which goes into effect on July 1, enables the state to pursue capital punishment against individuals convicted of the aggravated rape of a child. Such convictions could alternatively result in life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, or life imprisonment.

The bill was primarily backed by the Republican-controlled Tennessee Statehouse. Despite the U.S. Supreme Court's 2008 ruling that declared it unconstitutional to impose the death penalty in child sexual battery cases, proponents of the law hope the current conservative makeup of the Supreme Court might reverse this decision.

Florida enacted a similar law last year under Governor Ron DeSantis. In December, Florida prosecutors pursued the death penalty in a case involving the sexual battery of a minor under twelve, marking the first such case under the new statute. Additionally, Idaho's House approved comparable legislation, although it stalled in the Senate.

The legislation has met with criticism from Democratic lawmakers and child advocacy groups. They express concerns that the law may deter victims from coming forward, fearing the severe consequences for the accused, who are often close friends or family members. Critics also warn that such a law might incentivize perpetrators to kill their victims to avoid harsher penalties.

This law comes as Tennessee's executions are currently on hold while state officials review changes to the lethal injection process, following a 2022 report detailing flaws in the execution method. No timeline has been provided for when these changes might be completed.