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Nebraska Votes To Repeal Death Penalty

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The days of the death penalty in Nebraska are ending.

Lawmakers repealed the death penalty on Wednesday with a 30-19 vote that overrode the veto Republican Gov. Pete Ricketts signed on Tuesday. One week earlier, lawmakers voted 32-15 to pass LB 268, which would replace the death penalty with life without parole as the state's highest penalty.

The number of death penalty states in the U.S. stands at 31 following Nebraska's repeal.

"We're just thrilled that these legislators studied this issue so carefully and so intently and ultimately came to the conclusion that repealing the death penalty is the best thing for the state," Stacy Anderson, executive director of Nebraskans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, told The Huffington Post on Wednesday. "We've tinkered with it for 35 years, we haven't made it any better, and we've risked innocent folks because the death penalty has been on the books and threatened with it. At the end of the day, we know that the death penalty has not been serving Nebraskans and I'm thrilled that they've decided to override the governor's veto."

"We're thrilled that Nebraska has joined the ranks of states to recognize that the death penalty is broken beyond repair," Amnesty International's lead death penalty campaigner James Clark told The Huffington Post, noting Nebraska is the seventh state to repeal the punishment in the past eight years.

"Nebraska's vote marks the end of the death penalty in the United States," Shari Silberstein, executive director of Equal Justice USA, said in a statement. "Americans have been moving away from executions for more than ten years, but now we have a red state turning that trend into law for the first time in 40 years. Nebraska has shown the nation what happens when you put aside partisan politics and embrace simple common sense. The death penalty was already on its last legs, but it's hard to imagine that it has any staying power left after this."

Just one day earlier, the governor had urged senators to uphold his veto and had called the death penalty "important for public safety."

A coalition of Republicans, who are part of a growing movement of conservatives challenging the death penalty, came together to eliminate capital punishment in the state, arguing that it was out of step with core conservative values such as fiscal responsibility, protecting life and limiting interference from government.

Nebraska's death penalty repeal will apply to the 10 inmates currently on death row. Another death row inmate, Michael Ryan, died in prison on Sunday.

Nebraska hasn't actually carried out an execution since 1997. It becomes the first state to repeal the death penalty since Maryland eliminated the punishment in 2013. Nebraska is the first conservative state to repeal the death penalty since North Dakota abolished the punishment in 1973.