

Coalition urges end to youth executions: In *Roper v. Simmons*

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A wide array of nearly 30 religious groups has called upon the U.S. Supreme Court to outlaw the execution of minors. The high court is expected to hear oral arguments in a juvenile death penalty case when its new term opens in the fall.

Denominations that sometimes find little theological common ground joined on July 19 to submit a friend-of-the-court brief in *Roper v. Simmons*. They urged the court to heed “evolving standards of decency” and stop states from applying the death penalty to youths under 18 years old.

Signatories to the brief include the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Greek Orthodox Church, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the American Jewish Committee, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

“We are pleased that representatives of a broad cross section of religious groups in the United States— reflecting Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist traditions—have joined in this effort,” said Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, archbishop of Washington and chairman of the USCCB Domestic Policy Committee.

“It is our shared conviction that because of their age, juveniles lack the psychological maturity and judgment of adults and therefore should not be treated as adults for purposes of capital crimes,” the cardinal said.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said that “every major Jewish denomination is fundamentally opposed to the death penalty for minors” and that six other Jewish organizations have signed on to the brief.

Fifteen briefs opposing the death penalty for juveniles have been filed. Signatories include 48 nations, 18 Nobel Peace Prize laureates and a host of human rights, medical and legal groups.

But a lawyers group representing six states that allow the execution of murderers who were 16 and 17 when they committed the crime filed a brief arguing that the practice should continue. These lawyers represent Alabama, Delaware, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Virginia, which are among the 19 states that allow the execution of 16- and 17-year-old killers. -*Religion News Service*