

# Bill puts death penalty reprieve in spotlight

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State Sen. Steve O'Ban, R-Tacoma (left), speaks with a reporter Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2013 about his legislation countering Gov. Jay Inslee's moratorium on executions. O'Ban said that Inslee went around the Legislature when Inslee said he would suspend all executions in Washington during his time in office.

MELISSA SANTOS — Staff writer





OLYMPIA, Wash. — A Senate panel heard public testimony Wednesday on a measure that would prohibit any Washington governor from issuing a death penalty reprieve until after receiving a recommendation from the state Clemency and Pardons Board.

Senate Bill 6566 was introduced after Gov. Jay Inslee said earlier this month that he is suspending the use of the death penalty in Washington for as long as he's in office.

Republican Sen. Steve O'Ban sponsored the bill. He said Inslee committed an injustice by failing to consult with the families of victims and prosecutors before making his decision.

"The families deserve to be heard," O'Ban said.

Family members of some of those victims spoke at a news conference before testifying at the hearing before the Senate Law and Justice Committee.

Sherry Shaver, the mother of murder victim Telisha Shaver, said she found the governor's announcement confusing.

"It's been 18 years," she said, referring to the amount of time since her daughter's death. "How much longer to we have to wait for justice?"

Dwayne A. Woods, the man convicted for the double murder of 22-year-old Telisha Shaver and 18-year-old Jade Moore in Spokane County, has been on death row since 1997.

Leola Peden's daughter, Genie Harshfield, was killed in 1996. Allen Eugene Gregory was convicted of Harshfield's murder twice after the first case was overturned by the state Supreme Court.

"Twenty-four people absolutely felt he deserved it," Peden said of the number of jurors who convicted Gregory. "Why is he still breathing?"

Whatcom County Prosecutor David McEachran said he was surprised and disappointed by Inslee's moratorium. He spoke in favor of O'Ban's measure, saying having a board give the governor recommendations based on the input of all parties in death penalty cases would be helpful.

Sandy Mullins, a senior policy adviser with Inslee's office, said she believes Inslee spoke with family members in the case of Johnathan Lee Gentry, who was found guilty of fatally bludgeoning 12-year-old Cassie Holden in 1988. She added that there's no requirement by law that the governor has to contact a victim's family members.

Under the measure, the state Clemency and Pardons board would be required to give their recommendation for anyone sentenced to death after July 1. O'Ban's staff said it would not apply to those on death row at the time of Inslee's announcement.

Former Washington state legislator and family member of a murder victim, Debbie Regala, spoke against the bill, calling it a distraction from a larger conversation about whether the state should have a death penalty.

"This state needs to have a robust conversation about the use of the death penalty," she said. "We should take advantage of the opportunity Inslee has given us."

If passed, a governor would be under no legal obligation to follow the recommendations from a state Clemency and Pardons board. O'Ban, who's a member of the Senate Law and Justice Committee, says he thinks there's sufficient support for the bill to pass out of committee

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