

Ohio lawmakers push to revive executions through state budget bill

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—Ohio lawmakers are trying to end the state's years-long moratorium on executions by compelling state prison officials to seek federal help with obtaining long-sought lethal-injection drugs.

The state of Ohio hasn't put anyone to death since 2018, and Gov. Mike DeWine has said not to expect any executions during his term as governor, which runs through 2026. The two leading Republican candidates to succeed DeWine [support the death penalty in at least some cases](#).

"We will not as long as I'm governor," DeWine told reporters in December.

Under language added to the state's massive budget bill on Tuesday, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction would be directed to "make every effort to acquire lethal injection drugs" in collaboration with U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi.

Prisons officials would be required to update lawmakers twice per year about the status of those efforts.

Ohio, like other states, has struggled in recent years to obtain lethal-injection drugs from U.S. and European pharmaceutical companies, which have cut off sales on moral and legal grounds.

DeWine [has maintained a de facto moratorium on executions](#) since taking office in 2019, saying no executions will take place while he's governor [unless lawmakers alter state law](#) to permit alternative forms of execution. Since then, bills have been introduced to [authorize executions using nitrogen gas](#) and to [abolish the state's death penalty altogether](#), but neither passed.

DeWine, a Greene County Republican, has repeatedly [expressed his concern](#) that if pharmaceutical companies find that Ohio used their drugs to put people to death, they will refuse to sell any of their drugs (not just the ones used in executions) to the state. That would endanger the ability of thousands of Ohioans – such as Medicaid recipients, state troopers, and prison inmates – to get drugs through state programs.

The governor, who's term-limited in 2026, has told reporters that he'll have some sort of announcement about the death penalty, but not until after he signs the budget bill into law (which usually happens around late June).

However, when President Donald Trump was sworn back into office in January, he issued an [executive order](#) "restoring" the federal death penalty (which was [halted by the Biden administration in 2021](#)) and empowering the U.S. attorney general to "ensure that each state has a sufficient supply of drugs needed to carry out lethal injection."

In response, Attorney General Dave Yost, a Columbus Republican, wrote Bondi last month asking for help with obtaining lethal-injection drugs.

Yost, who's running for governor next year, wrote that pharmaceutical CEOs and their boards of directors should not be allowed to "subvert our country's laws based on their moral scruples." He's also repeatedly [railed against Ohio's death-penalty purgatory](#), arguing it [leads the state to spend hundreds of millions of dollars unnecessarily](#).

Yost, in a statement, said he didn't seek the budget measure. But, he said, "It's a commonsense approach and I fully support it."

It remains to be seen whether this new death-penalty measure -- one of [hundreds of changes Ohio House Republicans made Tuesday](#) to the massive budget bill -- will end up in the final budget that DeWine signs into law.

A DeWine spokesman declined comment on the budget measure Wednesday.

JoEllen Smith, a spokeswoman for the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, didn't directly answer when asked what, if anything, the department has been doing recently to search for execution drugs, as well as whether state prisons officials have been working with federal officials to obtain such drugs.

"Our department does not currently possess any of the execution drugs listed in Ohio's execution protocol," Smith said in a one-sentence reply.