

Reference:

Article I, Section 17

Ballot Title:

AMENDING ARTICLE I, SECTION 17 OF THE STATE CONSTITUTION

Ballot Summary:

Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution identical to a proposed amendment to Section 17 of Article I of the State Constitution which was approved by a statewide vote in 1998. The Supreme Court of Florida struck the 1998 amendment in a ruling in which four of the seven justices found that the ballot summary was inaccurate. The proposed amendment expressly authorizes the death penalty for capital crimes and expressly authorizes retroactive changes in the method of execution. The amendment changes the prohibition against "cruel or unusual punishment," currently provided in Section 17 of Article I of the State Constitution, to a prohibition against "cruel and unusual punishment" to conform with the wording of the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The amendment prohibits reduction of a death sentence based on invalidity of an execution method and provides for continued force of the sentence. The amendment permits any execution method unless prohibited by the United States Constitution. The amendment requires construction of the prohibition against cruel or unusual punishment and the proposed prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment to conform to United States Supreme Court interpretation of the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The amendment would prevent state courts, including the Florida Supreme Court, from treating the state constitutional prohibition against cruel or unusual punishment as being more expansive than the federal constitutional prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment or United States Supreme Court interpretations thereof. The amendment effectively nullifies rights currently allowed under the state prohibition against cruel or unusual punishment which may afford greater protections for those subject to punishment for crimes than will be provided by the amendment. Under the amendment, the protections afforded those subject to punishment for crimes under the "cruel or unusual punishment" clause, as that clause currently appears in Section 17 of Article I of the State Constitution, will be the same as the minimum protections provided under the "cruel and unusual" punishments clause of the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The amendment provides for retroactive applicability.

Specifically, the proposal amends Section 17 of Article I of the State Constitution, to read as set forth below. The word ~~stricken~~ is a deletion; words underlined are additions:

SECTION 17. Excessive punishments.--Excessive fines, cruel and ~~or~~ unusual punishment, attainder, forfeiture of estate, indefinite imprisonment, and unreasonable detention of witnesses are forbidden. The death penalty is an authorized punishment for capital crimes designated by the legislature. The prohibition against cruel or unusual punishment, and the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment, shall be construed in conformity with decisions of the United States Supreme Court which interpret the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment provided in the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Any method of execution shall be allowed, unless prohibited by the United States Constitution. Methods of execution may be designated by the legislature, and a change in any method of execution may be applied retroactively. A sentence of death shall not be reduced on the basis that a method of execution is invalid. In any case in which an execution method is declared invalid, the death sentence shall remain in force until the sentence can be lawfully executed by any valid method. This section shall apply retroactively.

Full Text:

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