

# Rehwinkel Vasilinda files bill to abolish state's death penalty

By Bill Cotterell

FLORIDA CAPITAL BUREAU

State Rep. Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda wants to abolish Florida's death penalty.

She knows her bill won't pass. But the second-term Democrat, a lawyer who teaches law at Tallahassee Community College, thinks a cost-benefit discussion of capital punishment would be timely and useful. She is morally opposed to capital punishment personally, and believes it doesn't work legally, but she said support for executions might be eroding in these tough budget times.

Also, she said in an interview Tuesday night, a company that makes one of the lethal drugs used in the state's lethal-injection "cocktail" has recently stopped making it. Pressure on drug companies by countries that don't have capital punishment may eventually cause states to run out of the materials, she said.

"I thought this was something that needs to be repealed for a number of reasons," she said. "If we're interested in cutting budgets and costs, it seems to me that the death penalty is much more expensive than life in prison without possibility of parole."

Florida law provides death for first-degree murder when juries find aggravating circumstances to outweigh any mitigating factors. If courts impose life, it is without parole.

"I'm just not sure this is something the government should be doing," said Rehwinkel Vasilinda.

"The death penalty has not been applied fairly over the years."

She acknowledged that there is no chance the Republican-run Legislature will pass her bill or that Gov. Rick Scott would sign it into law. But she said, as a member of the minority party, it is part of her job to advocate lost causes and get discussions going on alternatives.

She has sponsored other hopeless measures in her two years in the House, such as extending the sales tax to Internet sales and taxing bottled water.

"Sometimes, I do bills that I think aren't going to pass," she said. "I'll put things in my legislative platform that I think are just in need of getting a conversation going."