



# Roper v. Simmons, 543 U.S. 551 (2005)

Topics Covered: Minors' Rights, Criminal Law

**Outcome: Very Favorable**

## Issue

The issue in this case was whether a death penalty sentence, when imposed on a person who committed murder while still a minor, violates the Eighth Amendment prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

## AMA Interest

The AMA supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This convention, in turn, opposes the imposition of capital punishment for offenses committed by persons below 18 years of age.

## Case Summary

A Missouri court sentenced Mr. Simmons to death for committing a murder when he was 17 years old. The Missouri Supreme Court commuted Simmons' sentence, ruling that the death penalty for persons under the age of 18 violates the Eighth Amendment. The case was then reviewed by the United States Supreme Court

By a split decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty is unconstitutional when applied against persons who committed crimes while they were less than 18 years old.

## AMA Involvement

The AMA filed an *amicus curiae* brief, opposing the death penalty for juveniles, based on the Cruel and Unusual Punishment Clause of the United States Constitution. The brief contended that scientific medical evidence shows that persons who commit crimes when less than 18 years of age are not sufficiently culpable, from a constitutional viewpoint, to warrant the death penalty.

United States Supreme Court brief