

CHRISTA PIKE'S LEGAL TEAM FILES CLEMENCY PETITION WITH GOVERNOR LEE

Pike is a victim of repeated child rape in a state that recognizes the lifelong scars and trauma that result from such abuse

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (Sept. 3) — The legal team for Christa Pike this week filed a clemency petition with Governor Bill Lee requesting that Pike's death sentence be commuted to life in prison without possibility of parole. Pike is currently scheduled to be executed on September 30.

"Christa Pike bears the lifelong scars of extraordinary childhood abuse, trauma, and neglect, which the Attorney General's office recently acknowledged," said Kelly Gleason, counsel for Pike. "She is a survivor of multiple childhood rapes that began when she was still in diapers. The State of Tennessee recognizes the profound harm of such abuse and, as recently as this year, has expanded laws making child rape a capital offense. The governor now has an opportunity to protect a victim of child rape and correct the mistakes of the adults, institutions and systems that consistently failed Christa as a child."

At 18 years old — saddled by a lifetime of repeated sexual assaults, untreated mental illness, and severe trauma — Christa and two other people committed a crime that resulted in the murder of Colleen Slemmer, a fellow Job Corps student. Christa's documented childhood sexual abuse, neglect, and trauma do not justify her actions, but they cannot be separated from them.

If Pike is executed on September 30, she will be the first woman put to death by the state of Tennessee in more than 200 years. She would also be the first person Tennessee has executed in the modern death penalty era who was a teenager at the time of the offense. Commuting her sentence to life without possibility of parole does not absolve her of her guilt. To the contrary, it would continue to hold her accountable for the remainder of her natural life.

"After finally receiving the right treatment for her bipolar disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Christa has deep remorse for her actions," said Gleason. "We call on the governor to consider the tragedy of Christa's childhood and the way in which the adults and institutions charged with her care consistently failed to protect a vulnerable child. We respectfully urge Governor Lee show Christa mercy."

The clemency petition includes: recognition of the ways the juvenile justice systems in multiple states failed Christa; detailed findings from experts with decades of experience describing Christa's "almost unbearably abusive background" and the lifelong scars from her childhood rapes, along with corroborating evidence of those assaults; and firsthand accounts from incarcerated women and their families about the ways in which Christa has mentored and provided for them.

The Tennessee Constitution empowers the Governor with the sole authority to grant clemency.