

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TENNESSEE
AT NASHVILLE

FILED

07/10/2026

Clerk of the
Appellate Courts

STATE OF TENNESSEE v. CHRISTA GAIL PIKE

Criminal Court for Knox County
No. 58183A

No. M2020-01156-SC-DPE-DD

ORDER

Christa Gail Pike, a death-row inmate scheduled for execution on September 30, 2026, has filed a “Motion and Request to Appoint a Special Master Pursuant to Tenn. Sup. Ct. R. 12(4)(E).”¹ In her motion, Ms. Pike asserts facial and as-applied challenges to Tennessee’s current lethal injection protocol and requests the appointment of a special master “to develop the facts to support these claims.” Ms. Pike also contends that Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 12(4)(E) is unconstitutional and otherwise unlawful and requests that the Court reconsider and amend the rule. The State filed a response in opposition.

As this Court clarified in a previous order, a motion under Rule 12(4)(E) must “incorporate [a] . . . motion for a stay of execution.” Order, *Pike v. Skrmetti*, No. M2026-00667-SC-UNK-CV (May 12, 2026). Ms. Pike’s motion does not expressly request a stay of her execution. But because the motion asks this Court to permanently enjoin state officials from carrying out her execution pursuant to the current lethal injection protocol, in the interest of judicial economy we will construe her motion as requesting a stay of execution.

Upon due consideration, the Court appoints a special master under the conditions set forth below:

(1) The Honorable Mark Ward, Senior Judge, is hereby appointed as

¹ This Court’s execution order was entered under case number M2020-01156-SC-DPE-DD. Ms. Pike mistakenly filed this motion in *Pike v. State*, No. M2026-00667-SC-UNK-CV, which concerns a Davidson County Chancery Court proceeding challenging the constitutionality of Tennessee’s lethal injection protocol. Despite the error, we dispose of her application under the correct case number, and we order that all future filings related to this application shall be directed to this case number.

Special Master to conduct an evidentiary hearing and any other additional hearings the Special Master deems appropriate on the matters specifically referred by this order;

(2) The Special Master, pursuant to Rule 53 of the Tennessee Rules of Civil Procedure, is hereby directed to receive evidence and fix the time and place for beginning and closing the hearings on the issues referred by this order;

(3) The Special Master shall have and exercise such other powers as are appropriate and applicable under Rule 53 of the Tennessee Rules of Civil Procedure;

(4) Upon completion of the hearing, the Special Master shall transmit to this Court the record of the proceedings and the Special Master's report of findings of fact and conclusions of law not later than August 21, 2026;

(5) Any objections to the Special Master's report shall be filed within five days of the filing of the report but no later than August 28, 2026; and

(6) The clerk of the trial court shall make all necessary accommodations required by the Special Master, including making a courtroom available for hearings.

The Court refers the following specific issues to the Special Master:

(1) Given Ms. Pike's diagnosis of thrombocytosis, whether achieving peripheral IV access pursuant to the current lethal injection protocol would make it "*sure or very likely*" that the challenged protocol will "cause [Ms. Pike] serious illness and needless suffering," *see Baze v. Rees*, 553 U.S. 35, 50 (2008) (plurality opinion) (quoting *Helling v. McKinney*, 509 U.S. 25, 33 (1993));

(2) Given Ms. Pike's cited history of sexual assault and asserted diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD"), whether the movement of Ms. Pike to Riverbend Maximum Security Prison before the execution, where she would be observed by male prison officials for two weeks prior to the execution, would make it "*sure or very likely*" that the challenged protocol will "cause [Ms. Pike] serious illness and needless suffering," *see id.*;

(3) Given Ms. Pike's allegedly small and compromised veins, whether achieving peripheral IV access pursuant to the current lethal injection protocol would make it "*sure or very likely*" that the challenged protocol will

“cause [Ms. Pike] serious illness and needless suffering,” *see id.*;

(4) Whether Ms. Pike’s proposed alternative methods of execution would “significantly reduce a substantial risk of severe pain,” *id.* at 52; and

(5) Whether TDOC is required to permit or would be willing to permit Ms. Pike to have a clergy member or spiritual advisor in the execution chamber during her execution.

Issues not specifically referred to the Special Master are hereby held in abeyance pending completion of the Special Master’s report. The Court will set a briefing schedule on those issues upon receipt of the Special Master’s report.

Ms. Pike’s motion also raises challenges to Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 12(4)(E). Those challenges do not require factual development and can be decided based on the parties’ briefs. Additional briefing regarding Ms. Pike’s challenges to Rule 12(4)(E) may be filed by no later than July 17, 2026.

PER CURIAM

Kyle A. Hixson, J., not participating.