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CHRISTA PIKE'S LEGAL TEAM FILES NEW MOTION CHALLENGING CONSTITUTIONALITY OF LETHAL INJECTION PROTOCOL

Attorneys request Special Master to review facts relating to Christa Pike's significant risk of torture in light of recent botched execution

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Today, the legal team for Christa Pike filed a Rule 12 motion in the Tennessee Supreme Court arguing that the State of Tennessee is not equipped to constitutionally carry out Christa's execution, particularly following last month's botched execution of Tony Carruthers. Specifically, the motion requests appointment of a Special Master to review and develop the facts to support her claims challenging Tennessee's lethal injection protocol as applied to her and her unique medical conditions. Christa is currently scheduled for execution on September 30.

Her legal team argues that Christa suffers from unique physical, medical, and psychological conditions that should preclude her execution, as it would likely result in a torturous death that violates the Tennessee Constitution as well as the First, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

"The State of Tennessee is not able to constitutionally carry out executions," wrote Luke Ihnen, counsel for Christa. "Tony Carruthers' botched execution sheds light on what we already knew and have warned the State of Tennessee about for more than a year: TDOC lacks the qualified and trained medical personnel required to ensure prisoners do not face unnecessary pain and suffering as they are executed. Tennessee must confront this harsh reality or we will face another torturous execution."

Christa suffers from bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following a childhood scarred by repeated rape, physical and sexual assault, and neglect that began when she was a toddler. Christa's first of many documented rapes began when she was a toddler by her grandmother's boyfriend. The rapes, sexual assaults and abuse continued throughout her youth by family, neighbors and strangers without needed support from the states of North Carolina or West Virginia where she spent her childhood. The TDOC has diagnosed Christa with the severe mental illnesses of Bipolar Disorder and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

As the only woman on Tennessee's death row for a crime she committed when she was just 18 years old, Christa's incarceration has been marked by extreme deprivation. She was

held in solitary confinement for 27 years prior to a 2024 settlement that provides her with limited opportunities to interact with other women and work at times.

If her execution proceeds, and pursuant to the new lethal injection protocol, Christa would be again placed in solitary confinement for two weeks and then be moved from the women's prison to the men's prison where she will be under 24-hour surveillance by men during her death watch. She will then be forcibly restrained, likely by male guards, extracted from her death watch cell physically, and be strapped to a gurney and held down by the men doing so prior to her execution. According to Dr. Bethany Brand, a clinical psychologist who specializes in trauma disorders and who is familiar with Christa's case and her history of rapes at the hands of men throughout her life, this will trigger Christa's traumatic experiences which she will relive, not just remember. This amounts to torture, right as her execution is being carried out. Dr. Brand reported, "For a woman who was abandoned, repeatedly sexually and physically violated, and unprotected throughout her childhood ... the deliberate withdrawal of human connection in her final hours is not neutral. It replicates, with harsh precision, the abandonment she has known her entire life."

She adds: "What the protocol describes as a routine procedure will, for her, be experienced as a precise replication of the worst moments of her life ... It will return her, in full sensory and neurobiological force, to every violation she ever survived. She will die in the grip of her trauma, as she lived."

Because of Christa's medical condition and the historic difficulty medical professionals have had finding a suitable vein for blood draws, locating a suitable vein for the lethal injection IV line will be especially challenging. Christa will likely be repeatedly stabbed all over her body in an attempt to insert the two IV lines required for the execution. She has thrombocytosis, a blood condition marked by excessive platelets in the blood stream that can result in dangerous bleeding and clotting. If she is executed under the current protocol, this condition would create a "bloody froth" in her lungs that would amount to death by drowning in one's own blood" according to medical experts. Christa's small, compromised veins and documented history of difficult blood draws have resulted in qualified medical personnel using a smaller needle on her for routine testing. The protocol does not allow for use of a smaller needle meaning that the execution team will struggle accessing and maintaining a patent IV during her execution. It is also likely that the injection of pentobarbital into her compromised veins will leak into her tissue and muscles, weakening the potency of the drug leading to a lingering death and excruciating pain.

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During the May 21 botched execution of Tony Carruthers, executioners tried and failed to establish a second IV line for more than an hour despite no known prior history of difficult blood draws or small veins. Christa's serious conditions pose a substantial risk of unnecessary pain and suffering.

The motion also argues the current protocol is unconstitutional because there is no contingency plan in the event of a botched or failed execution to ensure Christa would receive proper medical care. TDOC's recent botched attempt to execute Tony Carruthers demonstrated that this is more than mere conjecture. Tennessee has never executed a woman using lethal injection. Christa is particularly vulnerable to a botched execution given her unique medical and psychological conditions. We are hopeful that the Tennessee Supreme Court will allow Christa to prove her claims in court.

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