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Contact: Abby Trotter
abby@hallstrategies.com or 615-969-8113

CHRISTA PIKE'S ATTORNEYS REQUEST HER DEATH SENTENCE BE RECONSIDERED DUE TO HER YOUTH AT TIME OF CRIME

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Christa Pike, the only woman on Tennessee's death row, today filed a [motion to reopen](#) her petition for post-conviction relief. Lawyers for Ms. Pike say a recent Tennessee Supreme Court ruling that "juveniles are constitutionally different than adults for sentencing purposes" requires reconsideration of her death sentence. Ms. Pike was just 18 at the time of her crime.

The Tennessee Supreme Court in *State vs. Booker* held that mandatory life in prison without parole for juveniles violates the 8th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

In 1996 Christa Pike was sentenced to death for a crime she committed when she was just 18 years old with two teenaged accomplices. If executed, she would be the sole individual in Tennessee in the modern era to be killed for actions committed at age 18. She would be the first woman the State of Tennessee has executed in more than 200 years.

"If Christa is executed for a crime she committed as a teenager, it will contradict Tennessee's deeply held beliefs in the value of human life and redemption, as well as the scientific consensus that youthful brains are not fully formed, especially for young people who experience severe abuse, neglect and trauma," said attorney Kelly Gleason. "It will demonstrate the cruel reality of Tennessee's arbitrary death scheme."

The latest filing by Ms. Pike's attorneys cites numerous state and federal court opinions, as well as well-established adolescent brain science that establish youth matters in sentencing. In *Booker*, the Tennessee Supreme Court acknowledged this science and recognized that youth matters especially when it comes to the State's harshest punishments.

There is clear scientific consensus that individuals experience significant brain, behavioral, and psychological change into late adolescence. Late adolescents, like juveniles, are just as susceptible to risky behavior and bad judgement, including peer pressure. There is no scientific difference between the brain of a 17-year-old and the brain of a 18-year-old. Only a handful of 18-year-old offenders has been sentenced to death in the last decades and all but Christa have had their death sentences vacated. No 18-year-old has been sentenced to death in Tennessee since Christa.

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While Christa received the death penalty for the crime, her accomplices, who were 17 and 18 years old at the time, were sentenced to life with the possibility of parole and time served, respectively. There is simply no justification for the drastic difference in punishment between Christa and her 17-year-old male co-defendant.

The U.S. Supreme Court held, in *Eddings vs. Oklahoma*, that “just as the chronological age of a minor is itself a mitigating factor of great weight, so must the background and mental and emotional development of a youthful defendant be duly considered in sentencing.” Christa’s childhood was marked by severe, repeated physical and sexual abuse, rapes, and violence from a very young age. She was born with brain damage from an alcoholic mother. Her severe mental illness went untreated. As Christa herself has said, “There is no excuse for what I did.” However, current understanding of trauma, mental illness, and the adolescent brain require Ms. Pike’s death sentence be reconsidered.

Learn more about Christa Pike and her case at mercyforchrista.org

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