GCADV

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Tennessee Governor Bill Lee
Office of the Governor
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37243

September 10, 2026

RE: Request for Commutation of Sentence of Death to Life in Prison on Behalf of Christa Gail Pike

Dear Governor Lee:

As organizations, scholars, individuals, law clinics, and survivors who are dedicated to ending all forms of violence against women, we are writing to urge you to commute the death sentence of Christa Pike to life imprisonment. At the time of the crime for which she was sentenced to death, Christa was an eighteen-year-old survivor of child sexual abuse and rape. It is vital that you understand the significance of her history, and its relationship to the crime she committed, in weighing whether the State of Tennessee should execute her.

Through our work, we have heard many accounts of gender-based violence, including child sexual abuse, rape, and intimate partner violence. From our work with victims, we also know that these experiences can have devastating consequences for victims' mental health and future relationships.

The violence inflicted on Christa Pike falls at the most extreme end of the spectrum of gender-based violence. It is not just that she was a toddler when she was sexually abused for the first time, or that she was raped by three more men before her eighteenth birthday. It is that Christa was forced to cope with her sexual abuse and rape virtually alone, without any of the victim support services that we know are so vital to recovery. Her parents were neglectful at best, and abusive at worst. When Christa developed symptoms of PTSD and bipolar disorder, no one in her life ensured that she received treatment and medication. In short, Christa was consistently failed by the people and systems that should have helped her. Research shows that girls in this situation are disproportionately likely to be incarcerated.

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It matters that Christa was a teenaged girl, rather than an adult man, at the time of the crime. We agree with the non-partisan Council on Criminal Justice, which reported in 2024 that "[w]hile men also experience childhood abuse and other forms of interpersonal victimization, these risk factors function differently in the lives of women and increase their risk for mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and intimate partner violence, all of which can contribute to their involvement in the criminal justice system." So while we do not argue that Christa's life should be spared solely on account of her gender, her experiences of abuse and violence happened *because* she was a girl, at a time when states provided them with far less protection.

Relating to the crime itself, we are struck by two facts. First, the crime was committed nearly a year to the day of when Christa was violently raped by a stranger. We support the finding of Dr. Bethany Brand that this anniversary would have rekindled the trauma of the rape, and that it would have affected Christa's mental health. Second, Christa did not commit this crime alone. She accompanied two other teenagers, one of whom was her abusive intimate partner. That partner, Tadaryl Shipp, received a more lenient sentence—and is now eligible for parole—because he was only 17 at the time of the crime, while she was 18. This disparity in outcomes is deeply troubling, particularly given the abusive character of his relationship with Christa.

We do not minimize the seriousness of the crime that Christa committed. Nor does the sexual violence that Christa experienced at such a young age excuse her crime. But it does provide an explanation for how she came to commit that crime, a context for trying to understand what otherwise might seem incomprehensible. No dispassionate observer could look at the circumstances of Christa's life, including her age at the time of the crime and her mental illness, and believe that she is among the most depraved and irredeemable offenders for whom the death penalty is traditionally reserved. Indeed, her execution would shock the sensibilities of most people who were familiar with the facts of her life.

Victims of violence are complex. A survivor is capable of acts of violence even while she is still a victim of serious trauma. Christa Pike suffered horrific physical and sexual abuse and serious trauma throughout her life, struggled with mental illness, and was a victim long before she became a defendant. Christa Pike has experienced a life-time of punishment and it is now time for mercy. We respectfully urge you to commute her death sentence to life imprisonment.

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Thank you for your serious consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Advocates Fighting to End Gender-Based Violence
(full list on following pages)

State Organizations:
Free Battered Texas Women
Georgia Justice Project
Healthy and Free Tennessee
Illinois Clemency Project for Battered Women
Illinois Prison Project
Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
Ohio Domestic Violence Network
Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, Inc.
Oklahoma Survivor Justice Coalition
Rights and Restoration Law Group, LLC
Safe Harbor of Northeast Kentucky
The Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) Center of University of Maryland - Baltimore
Utah Domestic Violence Coalition
Violence Free Minnesota
Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance

National Organizations:
BGilot Consulting
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center on Gender and Extreme Sentencing
Children's Best Interest Project
Clever Human LLC
Coalition Against Trafficking in Women
Emerge
International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination
Just Solutions: Bringing in Justice
Krystal Clear Foundation Inc.
Life Span
Love & Protect
Phillips Black, Inc.
Prostitution Research & Education
Rights4Girls
Sanctuary for Families
Shared Hope International
SheWhoDares Consulting LLC
Survivors Justice Project
The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls

Legal Clinics and Professors:
Beth E. Richie, Professor at University of Illinois Chicago
Buffalo Human Rights Center at the University at Buffalo School of Law, State University of New York
Carlotta Lepingwell, Clinical Associate Professor at Tulane School of Law's Criminal Justice Clinic

Carol Jacobsen, Professor at University of Michigan Law School and Founding Director of the Michigan Women's Justice & Clemency Project
Caroline Bettinger-Lopez, Professor at University of Miami School of Law's Human Rights Clinic
Carrie N. Baker, Professor of the Study of Women and Gender and Sylvia Dlugasch Bauman Chair in American Studies at Smith College
Deborah M. Weissman, Reef C. Ivey II Distinguished Professor of Law at University of North Carolina School of Law
Dr. Ann Russo, Professor at DePaul University
Dr. Walter DeKeseredy, Anna Deanne Carlson Endowed Chair of Social Sciences and Director of the Research Center on Violence at West Virginia University
Elisabeth Ward, Clinical Faculty and Executive Director at DePaul University College of Law's International Human Rights Law Institute
Elizabeth Brundige, Clinical Professor of Law at Cornell Law School's Gender Justice Clinic
Francesca Buzzi, Clinical Assistant Professor of Law at Tulane University's School of Law at the Women's Prison Project
Francisco Rivera, Clinical Professor of Law at Santa Clara University School of Law's International Human Rights Clinic
International Human Rights Law Institute at DePaul University College of Law
Jehanne E. Henry, Lecturer in Law at Columbia Law School and Independent Consultant at The Reckoning Project
Kirby Anwar, Visiting Associate Professor at CUNY School of Law's Human Rights and Gender Justice Clinic
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Leigh Goodmark, Marjorie Cook Professor of Law at University of Maryland Carey School of Law's Gender, Prison, and Trauma Clinic
Lisa Fontes, Ph.D., Retired University Professor at University of Massachusetts Amherst
Lisa Goodman, Ph.D., Professor at Boston College
Lydia Watts, Executive Director at The Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) Center of University of Maryland - Baltimore
Margaret Drew, Associate Professor of Law at University of Massachusetts Law School's Human Rights at Home Clinic
Marjorie Miller, Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Purchase College, SUNY
Meagan Belovsky, Clinical Professor at University of Texas School of Law's Domestic Violence Clinic
Michelle Brown, Professor of Criminology at University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Appalachian Justice Research Center
Nancy Chi Cantalupo, Associate Professor of Law at Wayne State University
Richard J. Wilson, Professor Emeritus of Law at Washington College of Law, American University
Shea M. Rhodes, Esquire, Director & Co-Founder at The Institute to Address Commercial Sexual Exploitation at Villanova Law
Stanislav Moroz, Clinical Associate Professor of Law at Tulane Law School's Women's Prison Project

Experts and Individuals:

Amy Bergquist, Associate Program Director of International Justice at The Advocates for Human Rights
Amy J. Sánchez, Chief Executive Officer at Battered Women's Justice Project
Ane Mathieson, Director of Policy, Advocacy & Research at Women Creating Change
Becky Mullins, Housing Advocate at GreenHouse17
Christy Burch, Chief Executive Officer at Ion Center
Cindene Pezzell, Director of the National Defense Center for Criminalized Survivors at Battered Women's Justice Project
Connie Canty at Safe Harbor Women's Shelter
Courtney Paul, Operations Manager at National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
Deena R. Hurwitz, Human Rights Lawyer
Dorchen A. Leidholdt, Senior Director of the Center for Battered Women's Legal Services at Sanctuary for Families
Dr. Kizzy Pittrell, Therapist at Catherine's Cottage
Ekaette Obot, Legal Program Director at Life Span
Elizabeth Flock, Journalist and Author
Ellie Williams, Legal Director, Justice for Incarcerated Survivors Program at Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence
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Jane Keiffer, Executive Director at Artemis Center
Jennifer Clark, Manager at New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Jennifer L. Grobelski, Attorney at Law at Life Span
Jessica Hill, RGNV at Life Crisis Center
Jessica Vera, Paralegal at Life Span
Judith Clark, Director at Survivors Justice Project
Julia Yoshimoto, Women's Justice Project Director at Oregon Justice Resource Center
Julie Cousler, Director at Pennsylvania School-Based Health Alliance
Karen Wyman, Director of Prevention and Intervention, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
Kyle M., Domestic Violence Counselor at Life Span
Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Writer
Linda Yanez, Counselor at Life Span
Lisa Glass, Director of Survivor Services at Villages of Hope
Lisa Sloyer, Advocate at TurnAround
Liz Stein, Human Trafficking Specialist at Sex Trade Survivor Caucus
Margaret Byrne, Director at Illinois Clemency Project for Battered Women
Margaret Gotthold, Health Educator Provider at West Miami Community Mental Health
Megan O'Donnell, Social Worker & Domestic Violence Advocate at Life Span
Melissa Farley, Ph.D., Executive Director at Prostitution Research & Education
Michelle Brewer, Independent Consultant Subject Matter Expert

Muriel Fox, Chair of Veteran Feminists of America
Nathalie Greenfield, Associate Attorney at Phillips Black, Inc.
Nicole Harbert, Survivor Leader at Sex Trade Survivor Caucus
Patrice James, Gender-Based Violence Subject Matter Expert and Program Director at Women's Justice Institute
Paul Bellan-Boyer, Reverend at Church of God in Christ, International
Rachel Barkley, Staff Attorney at Battered Women's Justice Project
Rachel Holmes, Managing Attorney at Georgia Justice Project
Rachel White-Domain, Director, Women & Survivors Program at Illinois Prison Project
Robin Levasseur, Survivor Advocate at NEASE
Ryan Koch, Nature Based Healing Lead at GreenHouse17
Sara Bennett, Documentary Photographer
Sharlene Rochard, Survivor Advocate at Rise Survivor Rise
Shelia Boyles, Assistant Director at Safe Harbor of Northeast Kentucky
Sydney McKinney, Executive Director at National Black Women's Justice Institute
Taina Bien-Aimé, Executive Director at Coalition Against Trafficking in Women
Terry Forliti, Executive Director at Alternative Solutions
Tracy Tripp, Attorney at Battered Women's Justice Project
Trent Lund, Advocate at Everybody Rise Up
Tricia Grant, Executive Director at Just Love Worldwide
Vanessa Timmons, Director of Education at Vanessa Timmons Coaching & Consulting
Zoe Bellatorre, Subject Matter Expert in Familial Trafficking and Founder of You Belong