

URGENT ACTION

WOMAN FACING EXECUTION FOR CRIME AT AGE 18

Christa Pike, aged 50, is scheduled to be executed in Tennessee, USA, on September 30, 2026. She was convicted in 1996 of a 1995 murder committed when she was 18, barely out of a childhood in which she endured rape, sexual and physical violence, abuse, and neglect. The state failed to protect her as a child despite having knowledge of what she was facing. Her court-appointed lawyers then failed her at her trial, presenting little of the mitigating evidence of this abuse or its psychological consequences. We urge the governor to stop this execution and grant clemency.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter to the government official(s) listed. Use the sample letter below as a guide or use your own words.
- [Click here](#) to report your action(s) on **UA 83.26**. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

Governor Bill Lee

1st Floor, State Capitol
600 Dr Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37243, USA

Webmail: <https://www.tn.gov/governor/contact-us/share-opinion.html>

Dear Governor,

Please stop the September 30, 2026 execution of **Christa Pike**. I do not seek to downplay the seriousness of the crime of which she was convicted. However, I urge you to consider the appalling treatment that marked her childhood – a childhood she was barely out of when the murder occurred – and to consider whether the jurors were presented with a full and cohesive narrative of her short life until that point to inform their life-or-death decision-making. I submit to you that they were not.

On the eve of the 1996 trial's sentencing phase, the inexperienced court-appointed lawyers abandoned their plan to present as their sole mitigation witness the psychologist who had produced a three-volume history of their young client. They had no back-up plan and did not seek more time to make one. They had not pursued any other witnesses and decided to put the defendant's parents and an aunt on the stand. At a post-conviction hearing, the lead lawyer conceded that he should have called many of the individuals interviewed by the psychologist.

In 2001, a psychiatrist/neurologist retained by the appeal lawyers for post-conviction proceedings concluded that Christa Pike met the criteria for bipolar disorder, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and had frontal lobe brain damage from birth. Another expert described Christa Pike as being "the product of an almost unbearably abusive background". In 2023, a psychologist with 30 years of experience in trauma-related disorders concluded that the abuse and neglect endured by Christa Pike as a child was "truly extreme" and its severity was "almost impossible to grasp".

The state failed to provide Christa Pike the protection she needed as a child despite multiple state actors having knowledge about what she was facing. Please do not perpetuate this failure and the failure of the trial lawyers by allowing this execution to proceed.

I appeal to you to grant clemency and to commute this death sentence.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On January 12, 1995, a 19-year-old female student in the Job Corps, a program for troubled youth in Knoxville, Tennessee, was murdered. Three teenagers in the program were charged with her murder: 18-year-old **Christa Pike**, her 17-year-old boyfriend, and an 18-year-old female. The boyfriend was exempt from the death penalty because of his age, and was sentenced to life imprisonment with parole, and the female teenager received six years' probation and credit for time served.

At her 1996 trial, Christa Pike was convicted of first-degree murder. Her two court-appointed lawyers had no prior capital case experience. The night before the sentencing phase, the lawyers abandoned their mitigation plan, deciding not to put their sole witness on the stand – a mitigation specialist (a psychologist) who had produced a three-volume social history of Christa Pike's childhood. The lawyers had not pursued any of the mitigation witnesses suggested by the psychologist, so opted to present three people available at short notice – Christa Pike's parents and an aunt. The limited presentation left jurors in the dark about the extent of the violence and abuse in the defendant's childhood and without expert analysis to help them understand its impact on her.

In 2001, a psychiatrist retained by the appeal lawyers concluded that Christa Pike met the criteria for bipolar disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and had frontal lobe brain damage from birth. Another expert described her as being “the product of an almost unbearably abusive background”. In 2023, a psychologist with expertise in trauma-related disorders and 30 years of experience in the field concluded that Christa Pike's childhood was characterized by “poverty, extreme and chronic sexual, physical, and emotional abuse as well as neglect”. This abuse and neglect qualified as “truly extreme”, she wrote, and the level of trauma she experienced was “almost impossible to grasp” because of its severity. The psychiatrist assessed Christa Pike for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and found that she had experienced 9 out of 10 ACEs, a “highly unusual” quantity. Moreover, a single perpetrator was not the cause of any or each ACE. “Rather, many adults mistreated and abused her in a multitude of ways”, compounding the trauma. Throughout her childhood, she was “a victim of violent predators”.

A 1984 U.S. Supreme Court ruling requires that a high level of deference be given to the performance of capital trial lawyers in appeal claims of ineffective assistance of counsel. This high bar under U.S. law requires that anyone facing the death penalty is provided “adequate legal assistance at all stages” and “above and beyond the protections afforded in non-capital cases.”

For more than 25 years, because she was the only woman on death row in Tennessee, Christa Pike was held in de facto solitary confinement. According to a therapist, this treatment was “ruinous” to Christa Pike's mental health, exacerbating the symptoms of her bipolar disorder and PTSD. The use of the death penalty against individuals with serious mental disabilities is prohibited under international law and standards. There have been 23 executions in the USA in 2026. Tennessee has executed 11 people since 2018. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases unconditionally.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: September 30, 2026

NAME AND PRONOUNS: Christa Pike, she/her