



TENNESSEE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Rick Musacchio
Executive Director
2800 McGavock Pike
Nashville, TN 37214

September 10, 2026

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

Dear Governor Lee,

Continuing our many conversations about the death penalty considering your encouragement to bring our perspective to your attention, we, the Bishops of the Dioceses of Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville speaking together through the Tennessee Catholic Conference again ask you to bring an end to the practice.

Pope Leo XIV, the first American born pope, recently restated teaching put forth by the last three popes, that in modern societies the death penalty is simply not necessary to protect the community and punish those convicted of horrible crimes. Further reflecting on the human dignity that everyone possesses as a child of God, he taught very clearly that one cannot call oneself pro-life for opposing abortion while at the same time allowing for the death penalty, the mistreatment of migrants, or ignoring the vulnerable.

As the execution of Christa Pike approaches, we come to you with the victims of violent crime and their families and friends in mind. We particularly pray for Colleen Slemmer, for whose killing Ms. Pike faces a death sentence. We have communicated our opposition to all executions over the years, but the state's plan to execute a woman for the first time in more than 200 years raises serious questions about justice and the appropriate punishment. She, along with two accomplices, was convicted of a truly horrible crime that took place when she was 18 years old. Despite a history of severe physical and sexual abuse as a child, mental illness, and questionable legal representation, she was the only one of the three to receive the death penalty.

We respectfully ask that you halt the execution of Ms. Pike.

Please know of our appreciation of your service to the people of Tennessee and of our prayers for you during the remainder of your term of office. Together we express our pro-life position. May we stand together, pro-life in all things.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend J. Mark Spalding
Bishop of Nashville

Most Reverend David P. Talley
Bishop of Memphis

Most Reverend Mark Beckman
Bishop of Knoxville