

URGENT ACTION

CHRISTA PIKE HOSPITALIZED AFTER EXECUTION FAILS

Christa Pike, a 50-year-old woman, was hospitalized after the state tried and failed to execute her in Tennessee, USA, on the evening of 30 September 2026. She was convicted in 1996 of a murder committed in 1995 when she was 18 years old.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

At her 1996 trial, Christa Pike was represented by two court-appointed lawyers who had no prior capital case experience. Their defence of her at the sentencing left jurors in the dark about the extent of the violence, abuse and neglect in her childhood and without expert analysis to help them understand its impact on her. For more than a quarter of a century, because she was the only woman on death row in Tennessee, Christa Pike was held in de facto solitary confinement until litigation ended this in 2024.

On 7 September 2026, five United Nations experts – whose mandates cover the death penalty, health, torture, and violence and discrimination against women and girls – called for commutation of Christa Pike's death sentence. They said her execution would mark "the culmination of a trajectory of severe physical and psychological suffering marked by childhood abuse and nearly three decades of solitary confinement on death row". On 18 September, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued its report on her case. It found that her legal representation at trial did not meet the standards required in death penalty proceedings. The USA, it concluded, "is responsible for the violation of the rights to life, liberty, and personal security, the right to equality before the law, the preservation of health and well-being, fair trial, protection from arbitrary arrest, and due process of law". Execution "would constitute a serious violation of her rights to life and due process."

On 28 September, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee denied clemency for Christa Pike. Her lawyers continued to seek a stay of execution from the courts. In a proceeding on 13 August 2026, the state had said that "The State does not dispute the terrible things that Ms. Pike suffered. I think everybody in this courtroom wishes that those things had never happened to Ms. Pike. I think we all wish that we were not here today and that she was not on death row". Christa Pike's lawyers sought to be allowed to file a successor petition, maintaining that this was "the first time in the history of Ms Pike's case, that the State has conceded her history of child sexual abuse and rape". This, they said, was "diametrically opposed" to the arguments the State put forward in prior proceedings", and "erodes the foundations" of the state post-conviction court's rejection of the claim of ineffective assistance of trial counsel and federal court deference given to this decision under US law. On the morning of 30 September, the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit issued a stay of execution to give it more time to "adequately address and resolve" the issues raised. The state appealed to the US Supreme Court, which lifted the stay. Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Ketanji Brown Jackson dissented, accusing the majority of "shortcircuit[ing] the ordinary process of appellate review. Tennessee's desire to expedite Pike's execution...cannot outweigh her fundamental interest in her own life." Capital cases "demand caution before acting irretrievably... Today, the Court, as it has too often lately, chooses to overlook that principle precisely when it matters most".

The execution had been scheduled for 10am on 30 September. The state had until midnight to carry it out or set a new date. It chose to go ahead. The execution began at about 8pm. Two syringes of pentobarbital were administered, but Christa Pike was still alive. Her lawyers filed an emergency motion in federal court for the execution to be stopped and for her to receive urgent medical care. They said: "Tonight the State of Tennessee once again failed to carry out a lawful execution. We take no pleasure in being right, but the concerns raised by Ms. Pike proved to be true: difficult vein access, blown veins, degraded pentobarbital, no emergency medical care available when things inevitably go wrong, all under a protocol that remains veiled in secrecy. Christa is being treated at a nearby hospital. We have not been informed as to her condition."

A prison spokesperson issued a statement: "The Tennessee Department of Correction followed every step of the State's lawful, established execution protocol approved by the Attorney General's Office. The lethal injection chemical in the protocol has consistently been effective, and the protocol does not allow for additional procedures beyond what was carried out this evening. Christa Pike has been transported to an off-site medical facility." Governor Lee ordered a review into Christa Pike's attempted execution, and suspended executions for the rest of 2026.

There have been 29 executions in the USA in 2026. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases unconditionally.

NAME: Christa Gail Pike

THIS IS THE FIRST AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 83/26

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/1380/2026/en/>

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