



International Academy of Trial Lawyers Condemns Botched Tennessee Execution and Renews its Call to Abolish the Death Penalty.

October 4, 2026-The Board of Directors of [The International Academy of Trial Lawyers](https://www.iatl.net/the-international-academy-of-trial-lawyers-calls-to-end-the-death-penalty-position-unanimously-approved-by-the-board-of-directors/) on [April 16, 2025](https://www.iatl.net/the-international-academy-of-trial-lawyers-calls-to-end-the-death-penalty-position-unanimously-approved-by-the-board-of-directors/), unanimously adopted a statement¹ opposing the death penalty and advocating for its abolition at both the state and federal levels in the United States. As we wrote then:

The inherent cruelty and psychological suffering inflicted by the death penalty are incompatible with the principles of human dignity and the prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment.

The events in Tennessee last week give renewed urgency to that position.

Horrific reports about the twice-botched execution of Christa Pike leave no doubt that the death penalty must be abolished. The death penalty is inherently and unavoidably cruel. It inflicts incalculable moral costs on society, even when inflicted on those who are found guilty of heinous crimes.

We begin by acknowledging the crime that brought Christa Pike to death row last week. Ms. Pike was a teenager when she and others brutally murdered her classmate, Colleen Slemmer. It was a horrific crime that inflicted immeasurable suffering on Ms. Slemmer and her family. A jury found her guilty of the crime and sentenced her to death.

Acknowledging the gravity of Ms. Pike's action does not mean that we can look away at what followed. The state of Tennessee attempted to execute Ms. Pike two times by lethal injection. Each attempt to kill Ms. Pike failed. We urge the American public to heed the accounts of the media² and legal observers³ who witnessed the botched execution and its aftermath. They describe the attempt to execute Ms. Pike in stark terms that confirm the death penalty is cruel, unusual, and incompatible with human dignity.

¹ See "The International Academy of Trial Lawyers Calls to End the Death Penalty – Position Unanimously Approved by the Board of Directors." April 16, 2025. The International Academy of Trial Lawyers. Available at: <https://www.iatl.net/the-international-academy-of-trial-lawyers-calls-to-end-the-death-penalty-position-unanimously-approved-by-the-board-of-directors/>.

² See e.g., Account of Kim Chandler. The Associated Press. October 1, 2026. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/christa-pike-execution-tennessee-f826a60582083b90ac7695ecb16afbdf>; see also "Tennessee Governor Halts Executions After Christa Gail Pike Survives Lethal Injection." NPR.org. October 1, 2026. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2026/10/01/nx-s1-5986822/tennessee-governor-halts-executions>.

³ In a filing asking a court to preserve the evidence of what happened, Ms. Pike's counsel described the barbarous events in detail. See "Read the Filing." The New York Times. October 2, 2025. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/10/02/us/documentfragment813181-2.html>



Governor of Tennessee Bill Lee described the failed execution as “deeply disturbing,” calling it a “tragedy” that “should not have happened.”⁴

What is “tragic” and “deeply disturbing” is that this attempt to execute a human being happened at all. The death penalty has no place in a civilized society. If the death penalty did not exist, this “most difficult of circumstances,” as the Governor put it, would never have occurred.

Governor Lee has rightly ordered a halt to all executions in Tennessee. But the “comprehensive review” he has called for is not enough. No review, no process, and no revised procedure can ever make the state-sanctioned killing of an incarcerated human being anything other than what it is: cruel, unusual, and incompatible with human dignity.

The death penalty must be abolished.

About the Academy: The International Academy of Trial Lawyers Academy stands as the world’s foremost trial lawyer organization, dedicated to excellence, advocacy, and legal reform. The Academy is dedicated to protecting and promoting the Rule of Law and steadfastly advocates for and defends it. Our membership includes 500 active trial lawyers in the United States and over 150 Fellows from 30 countries, representing both plaintiffs and defendants in civil cases, as well as prosecutors and criminal defense lawyers.

For additional information, visit [IATL.net](https://www.iatl.net)

Media Inquiries:

info@iatl.net

⁴ “Tennessee Suspends Executions as Christa Pike’s Lawyer Says Failed Lethal Injection Leaves Her in Critical Condition.” Richard Luscombe. The Guardian. October 1, 2026. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/oct/01/christa-pike-tennessee-governor-executions-year-pause> and “Christa Pike Getting ‘Life-Saving Medical Care’ After Surviving Tennessee Execution.” Thomson Reuters. October 1, 2026. <https://kfgo.com/2026/10/01/tennessee-governor-calls-failed-christa-pike-execution-a-tragedy/>. An audio recording of the Governor’s comments is available on Times Radio at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0G5r-U99ufE>