

TENNESSEE SUPREME COURT APPOINTS SPECIAL MASTER TO REVIEW EXECUTION PROTOCOLS FOR CHRISTA PIKE

Rare Rule 12 hearing scheduled Aug. 11-14; Senior Judge Mark Ward will review constitutionality of state's plans in light of Pike's history as a victim of childhood sexual abuse and rape and her medical conditions

JULY 24, 2026 (NASHVILLE, Tenn.) — The Tennessee Supreme Court has appointed Senior Judge Mark Ward as Special Master in a rare decision that allows for a thorough review of the planned execution of Christa Pike, which is scheduled for September 30. Judge Ward has ordered the hearing to be held August 11–14.

The procedure, invoked by the Court under its recently amended Rule 12(4)(E), allows for the appointment of a special master to take testimony and review evidence in cases that would affect the method or timing of a scheduled execution. Other inmates have sought review under this new process, but Ms. Pike's case is the first to be approved and proceed.

The Tennessee Supreme Court order requires, among other issues, that Judge Ward address whether Ms. Pike's execution at the hands of an all-male execution team is unconstitutional, given her lifelong, documented history as a victim of childhood rape and sexual violence. Ms. Pike was sexually abused as a toddler and suffered multiple rapes, in addition to enduring other severe trauma. The Tennessee Department of Correction has diagnosed her with post-traumatic stress disorder, which coexists with her bipolar disorder.

Ms. Pike's attorneys contend that she will be forced to relive her past traumatic experiences of sexual violence when the execution team forcibly extracts her from her cell, holds and straps her down to a gurney, and attempts to find a vein for the lethal injection drugs.

"We are pleased that the Tennessee Supreme Court recognizes and is taking seriously the problems we have identified with Tennessee's lethal injection protocol as it applies to Christa's specific mental and medical needs," said Pike attorney Luke Ihnen. "Christa suffered unimaginable sexual violence and abuse by adult male authority figures throughout her childhood. Housing her, even temporarily, in an all-male facility under 24-hour surveillance by male officers, and assigning all-male teams to extract her from her cell and strap her to the execution table, is inherently cruel and torturous given her history."

Ihnen added, "Christa is the first woman scheduled to be put to death by the State in 200 years. The protocol and guardrails to ensure that process works as intended are new and untested as it relates to her specific conditions. As we all saw with Tony Carruthers, the State does not have the qualified, trained personnel in place to carry out Christa's execution in a way that will not lead to a gruesome spectacle. We plan to make those arguments to the Court and are confident Judge Ward will share our assessment that Christa's execution as planned is inherently unconstitutional and must be enjoined."

Judge Ward will also consider whether the lethal injection protocol is constitutional as it relates to Pike's medical conditions, specifically the blood disorder thrombocytosis and her small and compromised veins, as well as her proposed alternatives.