

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



July 1, 2025

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor of Florida
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Re: Please stay the execution of Michael Bell and commute his sentence

Dear Governor DeSantis:

We write to ask you to grant a stay of the execution of Michael Bell and to commute his sentence to life without parole.

Bell was convicted and sentenced to death for the 1993 murders of Jimmy West and Tamecka Smith. He was subsequently found guilty of the 1989 murders of Lashawn Cowart and her two-year-old son Travis and the 1993 murder of Michael Johnson. We mourn the tragic deaths of all of Bell's victims. Their families and friends experienced terrible suffering at the time of the crimes and have had to live with painful loss ever since. May they find comfort in God.

It is indeed a duty of the state to protect the lives and safety of its citizens and to impose appropriate punishment for crimes, and we recognize your responsibility in ensuring this duty is carried out.

We nevertheless urge you to spare Mr. Bell's life. All human life, given by God, is sacred. This sacredness is not contingent upon one's guilt or innocence. There is a way to punish without ending another human life: life-long incarceration without the possibility of parole is a severe yet more humane punishment that ensures societal safety, allows the guilty the possibility of redemption, and offers finality to court processes.

In the Bible, the Lord asked through the prophet Ezekiel, "Do I find pleasure in the death of the wicked? Do I not rejoice when they turn from their evil way and live? . . . I find no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies" (Ez. 18:23, 32).

We appeal to you that it is possible both to achieve the purposes of punishment and to exercise mercy. We can entrust the final judgment of every individual to God. We pray for you, too, Governor, as you consider this request.

Sincerely,

Michael B. Sheedy

cc: Jason Weida, Esq., Chief of Staff, Executive Office of the Governor
Catholic Bishops of Florida

***ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI - DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE - DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG - DIOCESE OF ORLANDO
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