

July 24, 2023

Honorable Mike Parson  
Governor  
Missouri State Capitol  
Rm. 216  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

RE: Clemency for Johnny Johnson

On August 1, 2023, the state of Missouri is set to carry out the execution of Johnny Johnson for the July 2002 murder of 6-year-old Casey Williamson.

Casey's death was a tragic waste of life, and our hearts and prayers are with her family at this difficult time. Sadly, no punishment will restore her to her loved ones. Some may argue society needs the death penalty to protect life; we strongly believe, however, that society can adequately protect human life without capital punishment.

Mr. Johnson has suffered from severe mental issues since his adolescence, and was diagnosed with a learning disability at a young age that caused him to repeat kindergarten and the first grade. He was also heavily medicated, taking over 35 antipsychotic medications. Though he was prescribed to take these medications to help prevent auditory and visual hallucinations, at the time of the murder Mr. Johnson was off his meds, against the express order of his doctor. Considering the circumstances of Mr. Johnson's mental state at the time of the murder, we, the undersigned religious and civic leaders, request that clemency be granted to Mr. Johnson and that, rather than following through with his execution, the state instead commutes his sentence to life imprisonment without parole. We further request the Governor inform us when this letter is referred to the Board of Probation and Parole pursuant to Mo. Rev. Stat. § 217.800.

This past January marked the 51st anniversary of *Furman v. Georgia*, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that halted the death penalty in the United States for over a decade after determining that capital punishment constituted cruel and unusual punishment. Casey's death is a tragedy, but the execution of Mr. Johnson, rather than acting as a salve to the victim's bereaved loved ones, would be a new tragedy of its own. We urge you to consider clemency for Johnny Johnson.

Looking beyond this particular case, as religious and civic leaders we are also concerned that the use of the death penalty promotes revenge as a principle of criminal justice. As imperfect human beings, the Grace of God is not something we receive because we deserve it; rather, it is something He gives to us freely as an act of mercy. Likewise, although you may believe Mr. Johnson is deserving of capital punishment, we appeal to you as the governor of Missouri to commute his sentence to life without parole.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Morris  
Executive Director  
Missouri Catholic Conference