



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida

201 West Park Avenue, Tallahassee, Florida 32301-7715 * (850) 222-3803 * www.flaccb.org

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Contact:

Michele Taylor
Associate Director for Communications
(850) 205-6817
mtaylor@flaccb.org

Catholic bishops urge Governor DeSantis to spare the life of Michael Zack

TALLAHASSEE, FL – The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops (FCCB) has requested that Gov. Ron DeSantis stay the execution of Michael Zack and commute his sentence to life without parole. Zack is scheduled to be executed on October 3, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

Zack was convicted of and received a death sentence for the 1996 murder of Ravonne Smith of Pensacola. He also received a life sentence for the murder of Laura Rosillo in Okaloosa County that took place shortly before Smith's murder.

In a September 11, 2023, letter to DeSantis on behalf of the bishops of Florida, Michael Sheedy, FCCB executive director, recognized that Zack's "heinous and horrific crimes against these women have caused untold suffering to their families, friends, and communities."

"Yet, in taking the life of Mr. Zack, the state will do nothing to restore the victims' lives," said Sheedy. "Rather, state-sanctioned killing will only further fuel the growing societal disrespect for the dignity of human life. The death penalty merely perpetuates the cycles of violence and vengeance that permeate our culture."

Sheedy also noted the violence that was inflicted on Zack during his childhood. "In his youth, he endured an extremely abusive home environment, undergoing severe physical and sexual abuse at the hands of his stepfather."

Neuroscientific research shows that such traumatic experiences can have lasting effects on a child's developing brain, which can profoundly affect behavior. Zack's defense team presented expert testimony that he suffers from organic brain damage, fetal alcohol syndrome, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Before Zack's scheduled execution, Floridians will gather across the state to pray for him and his victims, for DeSantis as he considers the request to stay the execution, and for an end to the cycle of violence in society.

[The full text of the letter to DeSantis is available online.](#)

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The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Florida. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy and serves as liaison to the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. The archbishop and bishops of the seven (arch)dioceses in Florida constitute its board of directors.