

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



May 20, 2019

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

Re: Please stay execution and commute sentence of death to life

Dear Governor DeSantis:

Robert Joseph "Bobby Joe" Long was convicted of the tragic 1984 murder of Michelle Sims. He additionally pled guilty to, and received life sentences for, seven other murders. While your signing his death warrant was disheartening, it is not too late to choose life over death for Mr. Long by staying his execution.

Mr. Long's crimes are numerous and heinous. However, executions are to be reserved for the most aggravated and the least mitigated cases. Since his sentencing, modern medicine has learned a great deal about the effects of brain trauma. His attorneys have filed briefs that call attention to the multiple traumas he experienced throughout his life, including the motorcycle accident he suffered in 1974. That incident profoundly affected him and his behaviors. It contributed to his receiving a disability rating from the military, from which he was honorably discharged.

Even if there were no mitigating circumstances, the Conference would still implore you to choose life over death for Mr. Long. Although he caused much harm, society has been safe from his aggressive acts in the decades of his incarceration. Without taking his life, society can be protected while he endures the alternative sentence of life without the possibility of parole. It is a severe punishment.

We have long advocated for an end to the use of the death penalty. Pope Francis recently requested reformulation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* to reflect the inadmissibility of capital punishment. The death penalty is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person and denies the possibility of redemption.

Please promote a consistent pro-life ethic in our state. The cycle of violence – to which Mr. Long's acts have contributed – must end. His execution would only perpetuate it.

Floridians around the state are gathering in prayer for all who have been harmed by Mr. Long's actions, for him, and for an end to the use of the death penalty. We also pray for you as you consider this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael B. Sheedy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'S' at the end.

Michael B. Sheedy

cc: (Arch)Bishops of Florida