



July 26, 2023

The Honorable Michael Parson
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 720
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Governor Parson:

As leading mental health organizations in Missouri and nationally, we respectfully ask you to commute the death sentence of Johnny Johnson to life without parole. Mr. Johnson is a man incarcerated in your state and is scheduled to be executed on August 1st. He has persistent and profound mental illness, as well as documented developmental disabilities that impact in a profoundly negative way on his perceptions of reality, his ability to think rationally and logically and on his understanding about his impending execution and the reasons for it. We therefore strongly believe that his execution would violate the U.S. Constitution's prohibition on executing people who are not competent to understand the reason for their execution.

Documentation of Mr. Johnson's mental illness and disability date back to his childhood. At the age of six he was diagnosed with a learning disability and had to repeat kindergarten and first grade as a result of his developmental delays. He also experienced difficulties with gross and fine motor skills, and his mother has recounted how she would dress her son even till the age of five since he was unable to button, zip or tie, and teachers reported his difficulties with holding a pencil, or using scissors.

Mr. Johnson first attempted suicide at the age of 14, and by the age of 18 he had been admitted to the hospital four times for suicide attempts. During his adolescence Mr. Johnson sought treatment for a number of mental health disorders, including depression with psychotic features and schizoaffective disorder with auditory command hallucinations. As part of his illness, Mr. Johnson has suffered from both auditory and visual hallucinations, along with irrational and delusional beliefs, including a belief that he is a vampire, that he is undead, that he can be "mind manipulated" by others, and that he has been marked with the "seventh Sign."

At the time of the crime, Mr. Johnson was in the grips of active psychosis caused by schizophrenia and was experiencing command hallucinations that influenced his actions. During his incarceration at Potosi Correctional Center, Mr. Johnson's condition has worsened. He has been treated during the twenty years of his incarceration with over 35 antipsychotic medications, but he continues to have breakthroughs of psychotic symptomology.

In 1986, the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Ford v. Wainwright* that it is unconstitutional to execute people who are "insane." In 2007, the Court clarified in *Panetti v. Quarterman* that this prohibition applies to people who do not have enough of a connection to reality to understand

why they are being put to death. More recently, in 2019, the Court in *Madison v. Alabama* held that the Eighth Amendment prohibits executing a prisoner who cannot rationally understand the reasons for his execution, whether that inability is due to psychosis or dementia.

Most important to this case is that Mr. Johnson lacks a “rational understanding” of the reason for his execution. He believes that the reason for his impending execution is that Satan is using the State of Missouri to bring about the end of the world, as Satan himself has confirmed to Mr. Johnson. These delusional beliefs are repeatedly documented in his medical history.

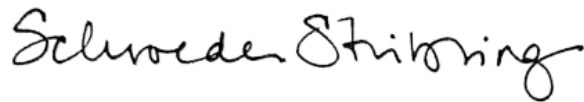
Irrespective of one’s position on the death penalty, it is well established that executing people whose developmental or medical status renders them less than fully able to comprehend the purpose of their punishment constitutes cruel and unusual punishment and does not comport with “evolving standards of decency.” In expressing our position, we do not trivialize in any way the magnitude of Mr. Johnson’s crime or the suffering of his victim and their family. However, we are gravely concerned that the issues concerning Mr. Johnson’s competence to be executed have not been adequately considered by the State of Missouri or by any court of law.

We urge you to commute Mr. Johnson’s sentence to life without parole and to do so without delay.

Sincerely,



Daniel H. Gillison Jr.
CEO
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)



Schroder Stribling
CEO
Mental Health America



Suzanne King
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Mental Health America of Eastern Missouri