

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



February 15, 2018

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

Re: *Please commute Susan Morris' murderer's sentence to life without parole*

Dear Governor Scott:

Eric Branch was convicted of committing the horrific acts of the 1993 rape and murder of Susan Morris. Among those he has harmed are her family and friends who must have experienced tremendous suffering in the wake of the crimes that ultimately ended her life. We sincerely hope and pray for their consolation and healing following her death and for Ms. Morris herself. We are inviting people across Florida to join in this prayer. May she rest in peace.

We do, however, ask that you commute Mr. Branch's sentence from death to life without the possibility of parole. It is our concern that the death penalty contributes to a growing disrespect for the sacredness of all human life. It feeds on an underlying sense of vengeance in our culture and adds to a callousness or coarseness towards one another. State-sanctioned killing does not deter or end violence, but instead it perpetuates a cycle of violence.

We also pray for the condemned, his family and friends. They are surely harmed by the choices he has made and they too suffer and will likely grieve his death. Even those who have committed great harm retain human dignity and the capacity to reform, to love, and to be loved. Their suffering at his premeditated death further demonstrates that the cycle of violence continues by executing him.

We know that you do not take executions lightly. You are tragically drawn deeply into these cases through your role in considering and ultimately signing death warrants. Accordingly, we also pray for you as we pray for Ms. Morris, Mr. Branch, and their family and friends.

Again, please commute Mr. Branch's sentence to life without parole. Society will be kept safe from him; he will never know life outside of confinement again; and a dehumanizing cycle of violence will be broken.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael B. Sheedy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael B. Sheedy

cc: (Arch)Bishops of Florida