



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida

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Catholic bishops urge Governor DeSantis to spare the life of Dozier School for Boys survivor

TALLAHASSEE, FL – The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops (FCCB) has implored Gov. Ron DeSantis to stay the execution of Loran Cole and commute his sentence to life without the possibility of parole. Cole is scheduled to be executed on August 29 for the 1994 murder of John Edwards. He was also convicted of robbing, kidnapping and assaulting Mr. Edwards' sister.

From June 1, 1984 through November 14, 1984, 17-year-old Cole was housed at the notorious Arthur G. Dozier School in Marianna, Florida. Cole's execution is scheduled on the heels of the governor's approval of the Dozier School for Boys and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Program, which will provide reparations for hundreds of men who endured the brutal abuse and torture at these state-based institutions.

"Mr. Cole himself was beaten, raped and tormented at Dozier," said Michael Sheedy, FCCB executive director, in an August 14, 2024, letter to DeSantis on behalf of the bishops of Florida. "He witnessed torture and daily beatings of other students. He was once forced to clean up the remains of another student who died by suicide after jumping off a building. He had his legs broken after trying to escape. Mr. Cole's jury never heard about the physical and mental abuse he endured at the hands of officers at Dozier."

Sheedy also noted, "Never having received mental health and trauma treatment until his arrival on death row in his late 20s, Mr. Cole, at age 57, is not the same person who committed the grave crimes for which he was convicted."

The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred. Even people who have committed terrible acts and caused great harm possess a human dignity instilled by God, our Creator. The death penalty attacks the inviolability of the human person and perpetuates the cycle of violence that is prevalent in our culture. Given our modern penal system, executions are unnecessary. Life-long incarceration without the possibility of parole is a severe yet more humane punishment that ensures societal safety, allows the guilty the possibility of redemption, and offers closure for victims of crime and their families.

Before Cole'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 death penalty and the cycle of violence in society.

[Full text of letter to DeSantis](#); [List of prayer vigils across the state](#)

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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.