



November 11, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

As advocates for people with serious mental illness and their families, we ask that you commute the death sentence of Lisa Montgomery, a woman with multiple severe mental illnesses and neurological disorders. We believe that Ms. Montgomery, who acted in the grip of a psychotic episode, should not be subject to the death penalty due to her brain damage and severe mental illnesses, and a sentence of life imprisonment without possibility of release is an appropriate sentence for her.

Mrs. Montgomery sustained organic brain damage before she was born due to her mother's alcohol abuse during pregnancy. She also inherited a genetic predisposition to serious mental illness from both sides of her family. She has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder with psychosis, a severe psychiatric condition characterized by extreme mood shifts, from mania to depression. During manic phases, people diagnosed with this condition may experience hallucinations, delusions, disordered thinking, and a loss of contact with reality.

Additionally, the relentless physical, psychological and sexual abuse suffered by Ms. Montgomery throughout her childhood severed her connection to reality and led to the development of dissociative disorder, a mental illness characterized by alternate identities and altered states of consciousness.

According to the neuropsychiatric evaluation of expert George W. Woods, Jr., M.D., "The emotional damage and neurological effects of chronic physical and psychological trauma suffered by Ms. Montgomery are profound." Another expert, Dr. Ruben C. Gur, in his neurobehavioral assessment, stated that "The brain abnormalities documented in the neuropsychological and the structural and functional neuroimaging studies provide evidence that Ms. Montgomery's actions have been influenced by a compromised neural substrate. Her brain is neither structurally nor functionally sound, and the damage is in areas that are needed for integrated behavior under full conscious control." Multiple experts have concluded that Mrs. Montgomery's crime was the product of her mental

illness and brain injuries. Even today, her grip on reality is fragile, maintained only with a complex regimen of psychotropic medications that she never received before being incarcerated. Moreover, it is likely that the stress of being given an execution date, removed from the institution where she has lived for many years, and transferred to a men's prison for execution will trigger her psychosis and cause her mental health to deteriorate dramatically.

In recognition of the reduced moral culpability of people like Mrs. Montgomery who suffer from severe mental illness and other traumatic brain injuries, several state legislatures are now considering bills that would exempt such individuals from the death penalty. These states' lawmakers acknowledge that our evolving standards of decency can no longer tolerate executing individuals with severe mental illness, just as we no longer execute juvenile offenders or individuals with intellectual disability in recognition of their reduced moral culpability.

President Trump, we know the decision whether to commute a death sentence is difficult, but in Lisa Montgomery's case, it is the right one. Because of her severe mental illness and the direct link between that illness and her crime, a sentence of life without parole is severe, yet just. We ask that you grant her clemency.

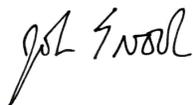
Sincerely,



Daniel H. Gillison, Jr.
Chief Executive Officer
National Alliance on Mental Illness



Paul Gionfriddo
President and Chief Executive Officer
Mental Health America



John Snook
Executive Director
Treatment Advocacy Center

cc. Rosalind Sargent-Burns, Esq., Pardon Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice

