

# URGENT ACTION

## MISSOURI'S FIRST EXECUTION OF 2025 IMMINENT

Lance Shockley is scheduled to be executed in Missouri on 14 October 2025 for the murder in 2005 of a police officer. The judge sentenced him to death after the jury could not decide. Evidence of misconduct by the jury foreperson was inadequately challenged by the defence. Various judges on the state Supreme Court, the US Court of Appeals, and the US Supreme Court have argued that the claim of inadequate legal representation is compelling, but Lance Shockley's ability to pursue it has been curtailed by the Court of Appeals. We call on the Governor to commute this death sentence.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

Governor Mike Kehoe  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 720

Jefferson City, MO 65102, USA

Email: <https://governor.mo.gov/contact-us/mo-governor>

Dear Governor,

*I urge you to commute Lance Shockley's death sentence. I am in no way seeking to downplay the serious nature of the 2005 crime – the murder of a police officer who was investigating a fatal drink-driving accident.*

*In contravention of the trial judge's specific order to jurors to avoid certain materials while deliberating on the case, the foreperson of the jury – whose own son was a police officer – shared with other jurors a "fictionalized autobiography" he had authored about the revenge murder of a man responsible for a fatal drink-driving accident who had "escaped justice" in the courts. The defence lawyer had failed to ask about the book's contents before its author was selected to sit on the jury and did not take the opportunity to interview jurors in support of a motion for a new trial when the episode emerged after the jury had voted to convict.*

*Lance Shockley was blocked from pursuing his claim of ineffectiveness of counsel in the Eighth Circuit because it denied him a "certificate of appealability" (COA). In at least four other Circuits he would have been granted a COA. Dissenting against the US Supreme Court's refusal to address an "entrenched circuit split" that has "significant consequences", two Justices wrote that the trial lawyer appeared to have been constitutionally ineffective, but that the Eighth Circuit's refusal to grant a COA was depriving Lance Shockley of the ability to pursue his claim.*

*Lance Shockley was sentenced to death even though the jury was unable to decide upon punishment. Under an unusual state law criticized by former Missouri judges who – citing statistical evidence – argued that it promotes "disparity in sentencing outcomes" and arbitrariness, the trial judge took the decision himself.*

*I note that the evidence against Lance Shockley was entirely circumstantial, which coupled with concerns on tainted jury deliberations renders this case troubling. His efforts to have modern DNA testing of crime scene evidence have so far been denied. I urge you to consider the international safeguard prohibiting the imposition of the death penalty when there is any "room for an alternative explanation of the facts".*

*I appeal to you to halt Lance Shockley's execution and to commute his death sentence.*

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Lance Shockley was charged with the 2005 murder of a police officer who had been investigating a fatal drunk-driving accident in 2004 in which the fiancé of Lance Shockley's sister-in-law had died. The state's theory was that Lance Shockley had killed the officer to stop the investigation into Shockley's alleged role in the accident. Among other things, the defence argued that the police had focused their attention on Lance Shockley to the exclusion of other possible perpetrators.

During jury selection for the 2009 trial, a prospective juror mentioned in passing that he had recently published a book. Neither side questioned him about the book or details of it. The man – whose son was a police officer – was selected to serve on the jury and sat as the foreperson. It transpired that his book was a “fictionalized autobiography” and included a long and graphic description of the revenge murder of a defendant who had killed the protagonist's wife in a drunk-driving incident, but who had only been sentenced to probation. The guilt phase of the jury deliberations lasted five days. Despite the judge having instructed the jurors to “avoid movies and books about trials... crime shows and issues of that nature” during the deliberation phase, the foreperson gave copies of his book to several jurors. The jury returned a guilty verdict, at which point the details and use of the book emerged. The defence lawyer moved for a mistrial, stating that he would concede ineffectiveness for failing to question the juror about the book at jury selection. The judge offered him the opportunity to take testimony from the foreperson and from other jurors, but the lawyer rejected the offer and declined to call any witnesses at all. The motion for a mistrial was denied. The judge removed the foreperson for the sentencing phase, at the end of which the jury could not return a unanimous decision on punishment. In these circumstances, Missouri law allows the judge to review the facts and decide upon punishment. The judge sentenced Lance Shockley to death.

Under international law, fair trial rights in capital cases demand adequate legal assistance at all stages of proceedings. On appeal, the Missouri Supreme Court ruled that the defence lawyer had not been constitutionally ineffective on the juror/book issue. It said that “even if [the] trial was not perfect” due to the foreperson “bringing his book to the sequestered jury”, the judge had not erred in finding that Lance Shockley “suffered no prejudice”. One of the judges dissented, arguing that failing to question the juror about his “provocative” and “virulently anti-defendant violent” novel and to call other jurors in support of a mistrial meant that the conviction and death sentence should be set aside. In 2023, the US District Court denied Lance Shockley's appeal, applying the highly deferential standard under US law for federal review of state court decisions. The District Court judge also denied a certificate of appealability (COA). An application for a COA was made to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, but this was denied 2 to 1, with the dissenting judge favouring a COA on the ineffective assistance of counsel claim. In at least four other federal Circuits her vote would have been enough for a COA to be granted. Shockley's lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court to resolve the split between federal circuits on granting COAs. The Supreme Court declined to do so, with two dissenting Justices writing, “It is difficult to see how an attorney's decision not to call witnesses in support of a credible mistrial motion, when invited to do so by the presiding judge in a capital murder trial, could fail to constitute ineffective assistance of counsel”, and that the Eighth Circuit had clearly been wrong when it treated the District Court's denial of relief as not even debatable, given the “multiple dissents” from the numerous judges who did not agree.

Lance Shockley has maintained his innocence of the murder. There is no direct evidence linking him to the crime, no blood, fingerprints, DNA, no murder weapon and no eyewitnesses. The Missouri Supreme Court has characterized the case against Lance Shockley as a “strong circumstantial” one. His lawyers describe it as weak. They are seeking modern DNA testing of crime scene evidence. This has been denied by a trial level court; the lawyers are appealing that decision.

Lance Shockley is said to be a positive force in prison, counselling other men in crisis, and skilled in the de-escalation of conflict. Under international law, reformation and social rehabilitation must be the “essential aim” of the prison system.

There have been 1,637 executions in the US since 1976, when the US Supreme Court upheld new capital statutes. Missouri accounts for 101 of these executions. There have been 30 executions in the USA in 2025. This would be Missouri's first execution this year. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases unconditionally.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** English. You may also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 14 October 2025.

**NAME:** Lance Shockley

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** n/a

## ADDITIONAL TARGETS

His Excellency Mr Warren Stephens  
*Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary*  
U.S. Embassy  
33 Nine Elms Lane, SW11 7US  
CF020 7499 9000  
Monday-Friday 0830-1730  
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