

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2024

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

Dear Governor Parson:

We write today to urgently ask that you halt the execution of Brian Joseph Dorsey scheduled for April 9, 2024. As lawmakers, we are committed to building a Missouri that is a beacon of justice, and we strive daily to represent the needs and demands of Missourians across the state. We strongly urge Mr. Dorsey's clemency request be immediately granted.¹

Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done.² The same is true for Mr. Dorsey. As ordained ministers, we believe in accountability and the sanctity of life, and do not think these tenets are mutually exclusive. We must therefore make investments in the social and economic well-being of all people. In order to do so, we must first acknowledge the moral depravity of executions. They are not about justice; they are about who has institutional power and who doesn't.

Mr. Dorsey is a 51-year-old son, cousin, and loved one to many in our community. He grew up in Jefferson City, where he experienced a dysfunctional home environment. As a child, he bore witness to his father's alcoholism and mental illnesses which manifested in harrowing physical and verbal abuse. As it would for any child, these early experiences left an indelible mark on Mr. Dorsey. Alcohol became his refuge as he grappled with Major Depressive Disorder in his late teens, and he ultimately became reliant on drugs and alcohol as a way to self-medicate.³

Medical experts have concluded that Mr. Dorsey was in a drug-induced psychosis, stemming from the interplay of withdrawal, extreme intoxication, Major Depressive Disorder,

¹ Application for Executive Clemency to the Honorable Michael L. Parson, Governor of Missouri on Behalf of Brian Joseph Dorsey (2024), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GVl8GhST4AxiKWplJ5yAgF3lRvNM-P/-/view>

² Bryan Stephenson, Just Mercy (2014).

³ *Supra*, note 1.

sleep deprivation, and psychosocial stress.⁴ As such, they have concluded that Mr. Dorsey was incapable of forming the intent required for a conviction of first-degree capital murder under Missouri law.⁵

Mr. Dorsey's case is also highlighted by the ineffective legal representation he was provided. He was advised by attorneys, who used a flat fee arrangement and had a financial conflict of interest in the case, to plead guilty to a capital offense, with the death penalty still on the table, based on no investigation or expert opinion regarding whether there were viable defenses available to him.⁶ Mr. Dorsey is scheduled to be executed because of the insufficient representation provided to him by his attorneys, in violation of his Sixth Amendment rights.

Additionally, at least 70 Missouri Department of Corrections officers and staffers and a former warden have urged a commutation of his sentence.⁷ Mr. Dorsey is widely viewed as an upstanding inmate of the facility where he is incarcerated, serving as a prison barber and being housed in the "honors dorm". His execution would still otherwise be constitutionally and morally unjustified, but the support from corrections officers only underscores the breadth of support for clemency.

Executing Mr. Dorsey would end a life while using the concepts of fairness and justice as a cynical pretext. We must dedicate ourselves to the actual fundamental principles of liberty and justice that animate our laws and our governance. You have it in your power to save a life by granting clemency. We urge you to use it.

Sincerely,



Cori Bush
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Emanuel Cleaver
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

⁴ *Supra*, note 1; Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus, *Dorsey v. Vandergriff*, No. SC100388 (Mo. Dec. 22, 2023), <https://www.courts.mo.gov/fv/c/Petition%20for%20Writ%20of%20Habeas%20Corpus%20%20Suggestions%20in%20Support.PDF?courtCode=SC&di=194963>

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Katie Moore, *Prison staffers say Missouri man should not get death penalty*, The Kansas City Star (last updated March 31, 2024), <https://www.kansascity.com/news/state/missouri/article284308253.html>; Timothy Lancaster, *We corrections officers know Brian Dorsey has changed. Gov. Parson, don't execute him*, The Kansas City Star (April 1, 2024), <https://www.kansascity.com/opinion/readers-opinion/guest-commentary/article287220260.html>; Julia Gomez, *'Model inmate': Missouri corrections officers seek death penalty reprieve for Brian Dorsey*, USA Today (last updated Jan. 23, 2024), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2024/01/22/brian-dorsey-missouri-execution/72314415007/>