CAPITAL PUNISHMENT CHRONOLOGY

The Tennessee Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of the state's death penalty statute. Here is a chronology of capital punishment in Tennessee.

1796 - Tennessee becomes a state. Common law allowed the death penalty, generally by hanging. The first of three state Constitutions also refers to "capital offenses."

1829 - Tennessee adopts a new criminal code, continuing to allow capital punishment by hanging.

1834 - The Second Tennessee Constitution contains identical language as the first on capital offenses.

1870 - Third state Constitution (which, although amended since, remains in effect) contains the same language as the first two on capital offenses.

1888 - Electrocution is authorized as a method of capital punishment in New York. That state's legislature approves this method in carrying out death sentences. Tennessee continues use of gallows.

1909 - Executions are moved from the county of conviction to the state prison.

1913 - Tennessee replaces hanging with the electric chair as its method of execution.

1915-16 - The death penalty resumes with electrocution. Executions reach peak in the state during the 1930s, when 47 convicts are put to death in the electric chair.

1960 - The last Tennessee execution by electrocution is held Nov. 7, when William Tines is executed for rape.

1972 - The U.S. Supreme Court declares in Furman vs. Georgia that the death penalty is unconstitutionally cruel and inhuman.

1974 - The General Assembly responds with a new death penalty statute, declared unconstitutional by the state's high court.

1976 - The U.S. Supreme Court allows states to reinstate capital punishment. Tennessee adopts a new statute.

1977 - The Tennessee Supreme Court strikes down the death penalty law. The legislature enacts a new law that, except for amendments, is in use today.

1979-81 - The state Supreme Court upholds the death penalty statute in two cases, and it continues through the 1980s.

1990 - A new state Supreme Court is elected and asks lawyers in a capital punishment case to include the constitutionality of the death penalty as part of arguments on appeal for the first indepth review of the issue in a decade.

1991 - The state Supreme Court upholds the death penalty in a 3-2 decision.

1998 - Tennessee law (TCA 40-23-114) makes lethal injection the method of execution for those committing an offense on or after January 1, 1999.

2000 - Tennessee law is amended making lethal injection the primary method of execution and allows death row inmates committing their offense prior to January 1, 1999, to choose electrocution. Robert Glen Coe is executed by lethal injection on April 19 for murder, aggravated rape, and aggravated kidnapping.

2004 – The Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the use of legal injection as a constitutionally permissible means of imposing the death sentence.

2005 – The Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Tennessee's three-drug legal injection protocol.

2006 - Sedley Alley is executed June 28 by means of lethal injection for the 1985 murder of 19-year-old Suzanne Collins in Shelby County.

2007 - February 1, Governor Bredesen issues executive order directing the TDOC to review the manner in which the death penalty is administered.

2007 - TDOC delivers revised death penalty protocols to Governor Bredesen on April 30. The moratorium is lifted on May 2.

2007 - May 9 Phillip Workman is executed by lethal injection for the 1981 shooting death of Memphis police officer Ronald Oliver.

2007 - September 12, Daryl Keith Holton became the first person to be executed by electrocution since 1960. He was the fourth person executed in Tennessee in 47 years. Holton was convicted in Bedford County of four counts of First Degree Murder.

2009 - Steve Henley was executed on February 4. Henley was convicted of two counts of First Degree Murder in Jackson County.

2009 - Cecil Johnson was executed on December 2. Johnson was convicted of three counts of First Degree Murder in Davidson County.

2010 - Governor Bredesen commuted the sentence of Gail Owens, one of only two women on death row in recent history.

2012 – TDOC and TBI foil escape attempt by female death row offender Christa Gail Pike. Pike was sentenced to death in 1996 for First Degree Murder in Knox County.

2013 – TDOC issued a revised protocol for court-ordered executions. The Department announced it will utilize a single-drug protocol to replace the previously used three-drug method. The protocol permits sole use of the sedative pentobarbital. Pentobarbital has been upheld in court challenges and used in other states.

2013 – Death row offender Michael Wayne Howell dies of natural causes at the Lois M. DeBerry Special Needs Facility. Howell was sentenced in 1989 for First Degree Murder in Shelby County.

2013 – Death row offender Paul Dennis Reid dies of natural causes at a Nashville hospital. Reid was sentenced to First Degree Murder in 1999 and 2000 in Davidson (5 counts) and Montgomery (2 counts) Counties.

2014 – Death row offender Gregory Thompson dies of natural causes at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution. Thompson was sentenced to First Degree Murder in 1985 in Coffee County.

2015 – Death row offender Donald Strouth dies of natural causes at a Nashville hospital. Strouth was sentenced to Murder Perpetration Of Robbery in 1978 in Sullivan County.

2016 – Death row offender William Stevens died of natural causes at a Nashville hospital. Stevens was sentenced to two counts of First Degree Murder in 1997 in Davidson County.

2016 – Death row offender Gary Cone dies of natural causes at a Nashville hospital. Cone was sentenced to two counts of First Degree Murder in 1982 in Shelby County.

2016 – Death row offender David McNish dies of natural causes at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution. McNish was sentenced to First Degree Murder in 1984 in Carter County.

2017 – The Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Tennessee's lethal injection protocol.

2017- Death row offender Walter Lee Caruthers dies of natural causes at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution. Caruthers was sentenced to Murder 1 in 1983 in Knox County.

2018 – TDOC adopted a three-drug protocol as an alternative to the single-drug protocol.

2018 - The death sentence of David Earl Miller was carried out by means of electrocution on December 6 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee. Miller was sentenced to Murder 1 in 1982 in Knox County.

2018 - The death sentence of Edmund Zagorski was executed by means of electrocution on November 1 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee. Zagorski was sentenced to Murder 1 in 1984 in Robertson County.

2018 – The Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the current three-drug lethal injection protocol as constitutional.

2018 - The death sentence of Billy Ray Irick was executed by means of lethal injection on August 9 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee. Irick was sentenced to Murder 1 in 1986 in Knox County.

2019 – Death row offender Charles Walton Wright dies of natural causes at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution. Wright was sentenced to Murder 1 in 1985 in Davidson County.

2019 - The death sentence of Donnie Johnson was executed by means of lethal injection on May 16 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee.

2019 - The death sentence of Stephen West was executed by means of electrocution on August 15 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee.

2019 - The death sentence of Lee Hall was executed by means of electrocution on December 5 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee.

2020 - The death sentence of Nicholas Sutton was executed by means of electrocution on February 20 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee.

2020 – Governor Bill Lee issued a reprieve from executions due to the challenges and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2020 – Death row offender Marlon Kiser dies of apparent natural causes at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution. Kiser was sentenced to First Degree Murder in 2003 in Hamilton County.

2021 – Public Chapter No. 399 was passed into law allowing certain defendants sentenced to death to petition the court for a determination as to whether the defendant is intellectually disabled.

2021 – Death row offender Derrick Quintero dies of natural causes at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution. Quintero was sentenced to First Degree Murder in 1991 in Stewart County.

2021 – Death row offender Steven L. Hugueley dies of apparent natural causes. Hugueley was sentenced to First Degree Murder in 2003 in Hardeman County.

2022 – Gov. Bill Lee paused all executions in Tennessee and granted a temporary reprieve for death row inmate Oscar Franklin Smith.

2023 – Following an independent review, Governor Lee directed the department to revise the state's lethal injection protocol, in consultation with the Governor's office and the Tennessee Attorney General's office.

2024 – Following a comprehensive review, and in consultation with the Tennessee Attorney General's Office, a revision of the lethal injection protocol was developed which will utilize the single drug pentobarbital.

2025 – The death sentence of Oscar Franklin Smith was executed by means of lethal injection on May 22 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee.

2025 – The death sentence of Byron Lewis Black was executed by means of lethal injection on August 5 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee.

2025 – The death sentence of Harold Wayne Nichols was executed by means of lethal injection on December 11 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee.

2026 – The death sentence of Anthony Darrell Hines was executed by means of lethal injection on August 13 in accordance with the laws of the state of Tennessee.