



# State of Tennessee

## Tennessee Board of Parole News Release

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### **"TENNESSEE SEASON TO REMEMBER" HONORS HOMICIDE VICTIMS & SURVIVORS** *Son of slain TDOC employee Debra Johnson, Mychal Austin, spoke at 17th annual event*

**NASHVILLE** - For the 17th consecutive year, families of homicide victims honored their lost loved ones during the annual "Tennessee Season to Remember" Thursday evening. The First Lady **Maria Lee** was joined by many state and local public safety officials for the ceremony at First Baptist Church in downtown Nashville.

The keynote speaker featured **Mychal Austin** of Nashville, Tennessee, the youngest son of longtime Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) administrator **Debra Johnson**, who was murdered by a prison escapee on August 7, 2019.

"Although a somber occasion, I am comforted by those of you I've met and seen, knowing this unique ordeal that my family and I have been tasked to deal with does have positive, angelic, and optimistic faces after such a traumatic and life-altering event," Austin said.

"As I reflect on the reason that I am here, the tragic murder of my mother, Correctional Administrator Debra Kay Johnson, I am reminded of her grace and class during an illustrious 38-year career in the Tennessee Department of Correction, where she touched many of her colleagues, inmates and the communities that she serviced throughout the state of Tennessee."

Families from across Tennessee placed ornaments on memorial wreaths in honor of their loved ones and the wreaths will be displayed in the Tennessee State Capitol throughout the holiday season.

**Cathy Gurley**, the CEO of victim advocacy group *You Have the Power*, placed the first ornament on the wreaths on behalf of **Andrea Conte**, the founder of the Tennessee Season to Remember. Conte started the memorial ceremony as a way to honor homicide victims.

Grammy nominated vocalist and pastor **San Franklin** from Mt. Juliet, Tennessee provided musical entertainment.

The Tennessee Board of Parole, Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, the office of Secretary of State **Tre Hargett**, the office of State Attorney General **Herbert H. Slatery III**, the office of State Treasurer **David Lillard, Jr.**, the Tennessee Department of Correction, Tennessee Department of Safety & Homeland Security, Tennessee Department of Finance & Administration's Office of Criminal Justice Programs, Tennessee District Attorneys

General Conference, and the Tennessee Rehabilitative Initiative in Correction (TRICOR) are working together on this year's event. Also providing support are victim advocacy groups *You Have the Power* and *Tennessee Voices for Victims*, U.S. Attorney's Office Middle District of Tennessee and the Davidson County District Attorney General's Office.

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