Dear Fred Rine,

We, the undersigned people, churches, and organizations, write to urge you, in the name of Jesus Christ, to immediately withdraw from your contract with the state of Alabama, and other states, to develop a new nitrogen gas execution protocol.

Over the past decade, the growing inaccessibility of lethal injection drugs and numerous accounts of brutally botched executions has changed the landscape of the death penalty in our nation. While some states have moved to abolish the death penalty and others have instituted a moratorium, a few states have brazenly renewed their commitment to the death penalty by exploring new execution mechanisms with the help of corporate partners.

One of those states is Alabama and one of those corporate partners is you, FDR Safety. Together, you are working to develop a new protocol, with an old history, to kill people: the gas chamber. It draws on our darkest moments of human experimentation and genocide practices by totalitarian and violent regimes of the past and present: Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and Communist China.

While gas chambers were used historically to execute people on death row, the practice was largely abandoned for its brutality years ago. Cyanide was the most recent gas used in 1999. In describing death by cyanide gas, a former warden of San Quentin Penitentiary said, “At first there is evidence of extreme horror, pain, and strangling. The eyes pop. The skin turns purple and the victim begins to drool.” After suffocation, the person’s body was sprayed with ammonia to neutralize traces of cyanide before orderlies, wearing gas masks, removed their body.

In fact, Alabama has also barred the use of gas in euthanizing animals. In 2011, Alabama Senate Bill 172 forced all animal shelters to deconstruct their gas chambers and cease euthanizing animals by gas. By January 2012, there were no more gas chambers in Alabama animal shelters.
Yet, with your help, Alabama has joined other states in revisiting old gas execution protocols and developing new ones. In March of 2018, Governor Kay Ivey signed a bill authorizing the use of nitrogen gas in executions. The protocol had not yet even been developed, let alone tested. But the following year, FDR Safety and Clinical Pharmacology Services joined forces to do just that.

Together, you claim to promote the health and safety of your clients and patients. It is unclear how you could have come so far from your founding mission and values, or how the public and private professional associations you belong to feel about your business decision to build nitrogen gas execution chambers and profit from killing.

In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court suspended the use of the death penalty due to concerns about its arbitrary application and capricious sentencing. It was sadly reinstated in 1976, but when later asked if they regretted doing so, the majority of presiding justices at the time said they did. Justice Harry Blackmun announced in 1994: “I no longer tinker with the machinery of death.” Since then, there have been countless reversals of death sentences and exonerations of people on death row, including some who have already been executed. (During the six years I have been visiting Tennessee’s Death Row, no less than six death sentences have been reversed.) We urge you to stop tinkering with death as well.

You may think this contract is just business, but we ask you to consider what you stand for and want your legacy to be. If FDR Safety continues to support the development of this new nitrogen gas execution protocol, it will be remembered in history for gassing people alive—some who are innocent, others mentally ill, and others striving for redemption. We urge you to terminate your contract for the sake of humanity.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Kevin Riggs
Senior Pastor, Franklin Community Church

Along with the following churches, people and organizations:

Shane Claiborne
Red Letter Christians

Rev. Jon Stearns
Senior Pastor, The Franklin Vineyard Church
Franklin, TN

Dr. Chris Williamson
Senior Pastor, Strong Tower Bible Church
Franklin, TN

Rev. Hewitt Sawyers
Senior Pastor, West Harpeth Primitive Baptist Church
Franklin, TN
Elder John Haynes
Senior Pastor, Burns Tabernacle Primitive Baptist Church
Franklin, TN

Rev. Walter Simmons
Senior Pastor, Empowerment Community Church
Franklin, TN

Rev. Dr. Michael Lippard
Retired Pastor, St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church
Franklin, TN

Rev. Susan L. Springer
Franklin, TN

Rev. Erin Racine
Pastor of Congregational Care, West End United Methodist Church
Nashville, TN

Rev. Thomas Wilson
White’s Chapel Primitive Baptist Church
Nashville, TN

Rev. Stacy Rector
Presbytery of Middle Tennessee

Rev. Edwin C. Sanders II
Senior Servant, Metropolitan Interdenominational Church
Nashville, TN

Dr. Brad Thomas
Senior Pastor, Raleigh/Scenic United Methodist Church
Memphis, TN

Rev. Cliff Bahlinger
Senior Pastor, St. Luke Lutheran Church
Cordova, TN

Rev. Stacey Harewell-Dye
Pastor of Missions and Outreach, West End United Methodist Church
Nashville, TN

Rev. Luis Sura
Better Options
Franklin, TN

Eric Boucher
Franklin Community Development
Franklin, TN

Elizabeth Madeira
Southern Christian Coalition
Franklin, TN

Eve Boger and Amy Duncan
Williamson Social Justice Alliance
Franklin, TN

Rev. Dr. Donna Krupkin Whitney
Associate Pastor, Metropolitan Interdenominational Church
Nashville, TN

Rev. Jeannie Alexander
No Exceptions
Nashville, TN

Rev. Dawn Bennett
Senior Pastor, The Table
Nashville, TN

Rev. Gordon H. Myers
Retired Clergy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Tennessee Poor People’s Campaign
Arlington, TN

Rev. Brandon Berg
Senior Pastor, First United Methodist Church
Bristol Tennessee.

Rev. Tricia Dillon Thomas
Teaching Elder/Co-Pastor, Renaissance Presbyterian Church
Chattanooga, TN

Rev. Judi Hoffman
Senior Pastor, St. John’s United Methodist Church
Memphis, TN