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Effort to kill inmate halted

2 hours of needle sticks fail; Strickland steps in

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BY **ALAN JOHNSON**

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

LUCASVILLE, Ohio -- Ohio's lethal-injection process is under attack again as Gov. Ted Strickland intervened yesterday and halted the execution of Cleveland killer Romell Broom after a prison medical team spent two tense hours trying without success to attach IV lines.

Using his executive clemency power, Strickland postponed Broom's execution until 10 a.m. next Tuesday.

That would be one day after the 25th anniversary of when Broom abducted, raped and stabbed to death 14-year-old Tryna Middleton of Cleveland as she walked home from a football game.

Strickland acted at the urging of Ohio prisons chief Terry Collins after Broom was jabbed repeatedly with lethal-injection needles in both arms and both legs -- a total of 18 attempts, Broom told his Columbus attorney, S. Adele Shank.

Media witnesses said Broom, 53, appeared to grimace in pain and clench and unclench his fists several times. At one point, he covered his face with both hands and appeared to be sobbing, his stomach heaving.

After numerous failures, Broom himself began pointing out new places on his arms to try. The prison team took a break after the first hour, but efforts to find suitable veins for the IV connections were unsuccessful in the second hour as well.



Romell Broom faces again at 10 a.m. Tue

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Collins said the medical technicians found suitable veins several times, only to have them collapse when a saline solution was injected.

Collins said he plans to "reassess the process" in the next few days to see whether any changes are needed. But he added emphatically, "I have confidence in the process. I have confidence in my team."

Broom's attorneys, Shank and Timothy Sweeney of Cleveland, were upset with the execution problems and said they will review the situation to see if further legal action is warranted.

"It was obviously a flawed process," Shank told reporters. "We felt things were going badly, and the governor made the right decision to grant this reprieve."

Almost forgotten in the commotion were Bessye and David Middleton, the murdered girl's parents, and her aunt, Hattie McIntosh. They sat quietly and patiently in the Death House, displaying little emotion during the entire ordeal.

The sunrise-to-sunset drama at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility near Lucasville began as Broom had a last-minute visit with his attorney and a phone call with his brother before preparing to take the 17 steps from his holding cell to the death chamber.

But a last-minute appeal to the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals pushed back the scheduled execution by about three hours. There was another brief delay as prison technicians replaced the lethal-injection syringes and drugs with a new batch.

Shortly before 2 p.m., media witnesses were escorted to the Death House. They would remain there for more than two hours.

At one point, Shank said, she and Sweeney called Strickland and Chief Justice Thomas J. Moyer, asking them to intervene.

The problem execution prompted the group Ohioans to Stop Executions to issue a statement saying that "no amount of adjustment to the death penalty process can achieve an outcome absent of pain and suffering for victims' family members, witnesses, corrections workers and the condemned inmate."

The group asked Strickland to halt all executions "pending a complete investigation and thorough review of Ohio's capital punishment system."

The effort was the longest failed attempt at an Ohio execution. In May 2006, it took 90 minutes to establish an IV line for Joseph Clark, 57, a Toledo murderer who had weak veins from years

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drug use.

The difficulty in Clark's execution led the state to change its lethal-injection procedures, which generally had gone smoothly.

Broom had a pattern of molesting young girls, records show. He was arrested three months after Middleton's murder when he forced an 11-year-old into his car. He earlier served 8 1/2 years in prison for raping a 12-year-old baby sitter.

Ohio has executed 32 men since 1999, including three this year.

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