

Following execution in Texas

## Mississippi court delays state killing of mentally incompetent woman

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Anthony Doyle was executed at the prison in Huntsville, Texas on Thursday. The condemned prisoner was injected with the drug pentobarbital, which is becoming scarce due to European manufacturers' refusal to supply the drug to US states due to their objection to its use in state executions.

Doyle was the fourth person executed in Texas this year and the 512th in the state since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976. He was convicted of beating a delivery woman to death with a baseball bat in 2003.

Also on Thursday, the Mississippi Supreme Court overruled a motion filed by the state attorney general to execute Michelle Byrom by the end of the day. Byrom was convicted of murder in 1999 for purportedly hiring one of her son's friends to shoot her husband, who abused her to the point of mental incompetency. The court also did not affirm an execution date for Charles Crawford, who had been scheduled for execution in Mississippi on March 26.

During Michelle Byrom's initial trial, prosecutors claimed she was the mastermind behind a plot to kill her husband, Edward, who was fatally shot in the head while Byrom was in the hospital receiving treatment for double pneumonia. Byrom's son, Edward Jr., pinned the murder on one of his friends during the trial, who he claimed was hired by his mother for \$15,000. Following the advice of her attorney's, Byrom waived her rights to a jury sentencing, after which the judge sentenced her to death.

However, Edward Jr. admitted in jailhouse letters that he committed the murder on his own in disdain for his father who had physically and verbally abused his family for years, an admission corroborated by a court-appointed psychologist. In fact, Byrom's attorney is

now filing a motion requesting additional discovery, suggesting that prosecutor Arch Bullard had knowledge about Edward Jr.'s confession, but intentionally left this out of the proceedings.

Despite the shaky grounds for convicting Byrom and sentencing her to death, Mississippi state officials are still seeking here immediate execution. Her post-conviction motion is still pending, and there has been no word on when a decision will be made by the court. If the execution goes forward, Byrom would be the first woman executed in Mississippi in 70 years.

Oklahoma has postponed two executions planned for the month of March due to the lack of drugs for lethal injection, and Alabama has similarly put on hold executions for 16 death row inmates who have exhausted their appeals and face the death penalty. These states and others have begun forays into the alterations of needed chemicals and have sought to keep the identities of their suppliers a secret.

An Oklahoma judge ruled on Wednesday that such secrecy is unconstitutional. Judge Patricia Parrish stated that "the secrecy statute is a violation of due process because access to the courts has been denied."

On Thursday, a Texas judge ordered the state to reveal the name of its new drug supplier, but the state attorney general's office is seeking to appeal the ruling. The lack of pharmaceuticals has not stopped the state from carrying out its execution plans. Texas has five more executions planned between now and the end of May.

Although the number of overall executions has decreased in recent years and may decline more due to lack of the required drugs, this decline has mainly been attributed to the high costs of prosecutions and the

availability of a sentence of life without parole. An increased number of exonerations of death row inmates and other prisoners has also diminished public support for the practice.

The total number of executions each year hit a peak in 1999, with 98 people killed across the United States, and has exponentially decreased to 39 in 2013. Including those who have been executed so far this year, 1,373 people have been killed by all of the US states combined since 1976.

Opposing capital punishment, two former justices of the New Hampshire Supreme Court have issued their support for the repeal of the death penalty. They point to statistical evidence that shows higher murder rates in states where the death penalty is most frequently used. They have also stated that the decision to sentence someone to death seems to be random and is easily influenced by political pressure and media attention. They concluded in their statements that “Abolishing the death penalty ... may replace rage with reason, retribution with self-respect, and enrich the character of our people as a whole.”



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