

# Oklahoma and Alabama carry out back-to-back executions by lethal injection

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21 July 2023

Back-to-back executions of inmates on death row by means of lethal injection were allowed to go forward in Oklahoma on Thursday and Alabama on Friday after last-minute stays were rejected by the courts.

Jemaine Cannon, 51, was given a lethal injection at 10:01 a.m. and pronounced dead 12 minutes later at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester. A federal appeals court denied Cannon's appeal seeking a stay of execution before he was administered the sedative midazolam, followed by paralytic vecuronium bromide and then potassium chloride, which stops the heart.

Cannon was convicted of killing 20-year-old and mother of two Sharonda Clark by stabbing her to death with a butcher knife in 1995. He was living with Clark in Tulsa after he escaped weeks earlier from a prison work center in southwest Oklahoma. He was serving a 15-year sentence for a brutal assault on another woman that included raping her and beating her with a claw hammer and an iron and kitchen toaster.

The Associated Press reported Thursday afternoon that Cannon had sought to present his actions as self-defense in a clemency hearing before the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board on June 7. His attorney, Mark Henricksen, told the panel that Cannon's trial and appellate attorneys were ineffective for not presenting evidence to support that claim.

Meanwhile, Cannon's trial attorneys presented no witnesses or exhibits and rested after prosecutors presented their case. The attorney said the execution of Cannon amounted to "historic barbarism" by the state of Oklahoma.

Henricksen went on to say, "Mr. Cannon has endured abuse and neglect for fifty years by those charged with his care. He sits in his cell a model prisoner. He is nearly deaf, blind and nearing death by natural causes. The decision to proceed with this particular execution

is obscene."

Prosecutors from the state attorney general's office urged the state to go forward with Cannon's execution and the board rejected clemency on a 3–2 vote.

The Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (OK-CADP) issued a statement saying, "Jemaine Cannon was physically abused by his mother and stepfather over his entire childhood. He suffers from Complex Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Cannon told a police investigator that he just snapped. The district attorneys are unable to recognize the vulnerability of the men that come before them. ... For the State to kill him is not justice, it is cruelty."

The execution of Canon was the second in Oklahoma this year and the ninth since lethal injections were resumed in the state in 2021. Oklahoma halted lethal injections when authorities realized in September 2015 hours before the scheduled execution of Richard Glossip that they received the wrong drug from a supplier. It was then discovered that this wrong drug had been used in the execution of Charles Frederick Warner on January 15, 2015.

Another botched execution took place in Oklahoma on April 29, 2014, when Clayton Lockett, 38, was declared unconscious ten minutes after the first of the three-drug lethal injection combination was given to him. However, three minutes later he began breathing heavily, writhing, clenching his teeth and straining to lift his head off the pillow. Lockett struggled on the gurney for 43 minutes before he died.

In Alabama, James Barber, 64, was pronounced dead at 1:56 a.m. on Friday at the William C. Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, according to Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall. Barber was executed after the US Supreme Court denied his request for a stay that included a claim that lethal injection could

result in cruel and unusual punishment.

Barber was sentenced to death for the 2001 murder of 75-year-old Dorothy Epps with a hammer while addicted to numerous substances. Sarah Gregory, the granddaughter of Epps, has spoken of how she came to forgive Barber and forge a friendship with him. She said other members of her family did not feel the same way.

Giving his last words, Barber said, “I want to tell the Epps family I love them. I’m sorry for what happened. No words would fit how I feel.” Barber also said he wanted to tell Republican Alabama Governor Kay Ivey, “and the people in this room that I forgive you for what you are about to do.”

In 2022, Alabama botched three executions by lethal injection, two of which had to be abandoned. In the case of Joe Nathan James Jr, who was executed on July 28 last year, the death row inmate suffered for three hours before he died.

After an internal review, Alabama officials said the state was ready to resume executions. According to court filings, the review changed only death chamber personnel and the amount of time given for killing an inmate.

In its denial of the stay request, the Supreme Court majority did not comment. In a dissent that was signed by Justices Sotomayor and Kagan, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson wrote that the court was allowing “Alabama to experiment again with a human life.”

Jackson said the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution forbids cruel and unusual punishment and “demands more than the state’s word that this time will be different. The court should not allow Alabama to test the efficacy of its internal review by using Barber as its ‘guinea pig.’”

Before Barber was put to death, the international human rights group Reprieve issued a statement which explained, “There’s no humane method of execution. Executions aren’t working—and it’s torture ... The state shouldn’t be resuming executions, it should be ending them once and for all.”



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