

Florida executes Victor Jones, School for Boys torture victim, as state shatters record for government-sanctioned killings

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The state of Florida carried out its latest act of state violence on Wednesday, September 30, proceeding with the execution of Victor Tony Jones, a survivor of horrific state-sanctioned child abuse at a Florida school for boys, even after the state formally recognized him as a victim.

As Governor Ron DeSantis drives executions to a modern-era record for the state, Jones' case lays bare the systemic failures and political expediency defining Florida's death penalty system. Jones' execution was the 13th so far this year, and the state is on track to put to death a record 15 individuals in 2025.

Jones, 64, was executed by lethal injection at the Florida State Prison near Starke. Pronounced dead at 6:13 p.m. ET, Jones is now the 34th inmate executed in the US this year, the highest number of annual executions in the nation since 2014, and the 13th in the state of Florida so far in 2025.

Jones was convicted and sentenced to death in 1993 for the December 1990 murders of his employers, Matilda Nestor, 66, and Jacob Nestor, 67, during a robbery at their Miami-Dade business.

Matilda Nestor was stabbed in the back of the neck, severing her aorta, and Jacob Nestor was stabbed in the chest, puncturing his heart. Before succumbing, Jacob Nestor managed to retrieve his pistol and shoot Jones in the forehead. Police found Jones wounded at the scene with the Nestors' wallets, keys and money in his pockets. Jones later admitted at the hospital that he killed the couple because they owed him money.

In Jones' final appeals for a reprieve, his attorneys argued that newly discovered evidence concerning the abuse he suffered at the notorious Okeechobee School for Boys should warrant a life sentence. They also raised arguments regarding their client's intellectual disability. On September 24, 2025, the Florida Supreme Court rejected the appeal in a 5-1 decision, declaring the arguments about abuse "procedurally barred" because the abuse occurred nearly 50 years ago and was not raised at trial or in prior postconviction proceedings.

Attorneys subsequently filed a petition for certiorari with the US Supreme Court, urging it to stop Jones' execution and challenging the state's minimization of their client's mitigating evidence. The nation's high court refused to grant a stay,

clearing the way for Jones to be put to death.

The most egregious element of Jones' case lies in Florida executing a man it has already compensated for state-inflicted torture. Jones is an intellectually disabled black man who survived brutal abuse while confined at the Okeechobee school.

For decades, prosecutors successfully perpetuated a false and preposterous narrative, mocking Jones and telling jurors he deserved death because he squandered the "opportunities" Florida offered him at the Okeechobee school. Jones' testimony of abuse was consistently dismissed as not credible.

The horrific truth, now officially acknowledged by the state, reveals that Jones' childhood was marked by severe trauma and institutional abuse. While confined at Okeechobee, Jones was:

- beaten with leather straps;
- called racist slurs by guards;
- forced to witness countless rapes;
- thrown into solitary confinement after fighting off assaults, leaving him with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation and hearing voices.

In 2024, the Florida legislature formally acknowledged the horrific abuse at both the Okeechobee and Dozier schools, segregated facilities for boys incarcerated for such "crimes" as truancy or "incurability." In January 2025, the Florida Attorney General's Office sent a letter to Jones formally recognizing him as a survivor of abuse and making him eligible for compensation through the Dozier and Okeechobee School Victim Compensation Fund, a \$20 million state fund established in 2024 to compensate living survivors for the mental, physical, or sexual abuse they endured between 1940 and 1975.

This legislative apology called the era "a unique and shameful chapter in the history of this state." Each eligible survivor who applied by the deadline will receive an equal share of this fund. With 928 approved applicants, the payout is approximately \$21,253 per person, a pitiful amount to compensate for unimaginable abuse and torture.

To receive his compensation, Jones had to prove he was confined during the relevant time and suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Only 53 days after the state

deposited the compensation into his prison account, Governor DeSantis set his execution date.

Despite Florida's admission of torture at the schools, the state's Attorney General's Office refused to turn over records related to Jones' abuse and argued that the compensation letter "doesn't mean he was abused." The office insisted that the abuse evidence was irrelevant as mitigation and "too late" to present. Opponents argued that executing Jones meant killing a man whom Florida had already admitted it brutalized as a child. Florida has previously executed survivors of Dozier or Okeechobee; at least nine men who were confined at these prison "schools" ended up on death row and were executed.

Victor Jones' traumatic past is intrinsically linked to the dark history of the Florida School for Boys system, which included the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys in Marianna (1900–2011) and its overflow campus in Okeechobee (opened 1955). For 111 years, the schools gained a grim reputation for abuse, beatings, rapes, torture and even murder of students by staff.

Abuse was documented as early as 1903, including reports of children chained to walls in irons. Staff beat boys severely, often in the "White House," a detention building. The whippings were so severe that some boys reported their skin blistered and bled profusely; sexual abuse by staff members was also reported.

The most chilling evidence of the schools' operations emerged after the state closed Dozier in 2011. Forensic anthropologists from the University of South Florida (USF) documented nearly 100 deaths at the school from 1914 to 1973. Between 2012 and 2016, USF researchers found the remains of 55 bodies in unmarked graves, many located outside the official cemetery boundaries, including under a roadway and brush. The bodies included children listed as missing, and some remains exhibited signs of blunt force trauma or gunshot wounds. Historically, black boys died and were buried three times as often as white boys.

Jones' execution comes amid a rapid acceleration of state killing under Governor DeSantis. As the 13th person executed in Florida in 2025, his death shattered the state's modern-era record, which previously stood at eight executions, set in 2014. Florida has executed more people this year than any other state, followed by Texas with five.

Critics argue that the governor holds complete control over signing death warrants, a system critics argue sets the stage for politically motivated state-sanctioned killings. DeSantis has stated he takes capital cases "very seriously" and believes the death penalty is the "only appropriate punishment" for "the worst of the worst."

Beyond the sheer volume of executions, Florida has expanded its death penalty aggressively. In 2023, the state enacted two laws that critics say violate the US Constitution: lowering the jury threshold required for a death sentence from unanimous (12-0) to 8-4, the lowest in the nation, and authorizing the death penalty for crimes that do not result in the victim's death.

Florida also led the nation in new death sentences in both 2023 (5) and 2024 (7).

Executions were temporarily suspended in the state following the execution of Angel Diaz on December 13, 2006. Florida uses a three-drug cocktail for lethal injection, consisting of a sedative, a paralytic and a drug that stops the heart. During Diaz's execution, he continued to move following the first round of injections, at one point asking, "What's going on?" A second set of injections was then administered, and it took a total of 34 minutes before Diaz was declared dead.

The sharp increase in executions in Florida under DeSantis has driven a national increase in 2025. A total of 33 people have been put to death in the US this year, surpassing the total of 25 executions carried out in 2024.

This dramatic ratcheting up of state killing coincides with President Donald Trump's urging prosecutors to aggressively seek the death penalty. Experts note that governors may be signing warrants now because the death penalty "seems to matter to the president," implying a political motivation.

By continuing this rapid pace of execution, Florida—and consequently the US—maintains its status among the countries—alongside Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt—that carry out the highest number of confirmed executions.

During the week of October 13, an unprecedented five executions are scheduled, one each in Missouri, Florida, Mississippi, Texas and Arizona. Last year, four executions were carried out the week of September 23, one each in Texas, Missouri, Alabama and Oklahoma. Two additional executions are scheduled later in October, one each in Alabama and Florida.

The Texas execution of Rob Roberson, set for October 16, has sparked particular outrage as he maintains his innocence and was convicted largely based on now-discredited "shaken baby syndrome" evidence in the 2002 death of his two-year-old daughter Nikki. Roberson's autism and undiagnosed developmental disability were also not adequately considered at trial.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, since the US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, the states with the highest number of executions are Texas (596), Oklahoma (129), Florida (119), Virginia (113) and Missouri (101).



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