

State killing spree continues with Norman Grim execution, Florida's 15th of the year

Kate Randall
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Norman Mearle Grim Jr. died by lethal injection at Florida State Prison on Tuesday evening, October 28, 2025, at 6:14 p.m., marking Florida's 15th execution this year. The condemned inmate did not meet with any visitors before his scheduled execution and made no final statement.

Under Governor Ron DeSantis, Florida has put to death more people than any other state in 2025, also setting a new record for the state for executions in a single year. The previous highest tally in Florida since the US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976 was eight. If the remaining scheduled executions are carried out, the state is projected to reach 17 executions this year.

Grim was convicted in December 2000 of sexual battery and first-degree murder for the 1998 killing of his next-door neighbor, Cynthia Campbell. Campbell, a 41-year-old lawyer, was brutally attacked by Grim shortly after he invited her over for coffee. Campbell's battered body was later found by a fisherman off the Pensacola Bay Bridge, having suffered multiple blunt-force injuries and stab wounds.

Grim's background leading up to this brutal killing was traumatic. He was raised in a multigenerational cycle of violence and alcoholism. Before the crime, he had sought counseling and medication for his mental illness and early-life trauma. However, at his trial in 2000 he refused to allow his lawyers to present these mitigating factors, leading to a jury recommendation of death by a unanimous 12-0 vote.

During his sentencing phase, the trial court recognized his disruptive home life, abuse as a child and his mental health problems as mitigating factors but assigned no weight to his lack of long-term psychiatric care.

More recently, in a hearing earlier this month, Grim

waived his final appeals. Opponents of the death penalty argue these decisions were rooted in the same trauma that taught him his life did not matter, effectively turning his execution into a state-assisted suicide.

Grim faced execution without the protections every defendant is owed under the law. His previous defense attorney had retired years ago and never officially withdrew. It was only after DeSantis signed Grim's death warrant that the state filed an Emergency Motion to Appoint Counsel on the grounds that Grim was technically without representation. This resulted in newly appointed counsel having only a few days to review decades of court records and submit an initial filing, which counsel called an "unreasonable ask" that posed a "constitutional crisis" in the state.

Exceptional procedural death penalty rules

Though Grim's jury was unanimous, his case sheds light on Florida's exceptional procedural rules. Florida is one of only two states, the other being Alabama, that authorizes juries to recommend death sentences with a non-unanimous vote. Currently, Florida law only requires eight of 12 jurors to recommend a death sentence.

Grim's earlier appeals were repeatedly denied by the courts. Only after the US Supreme Court's 2016 decision in *Hurst v. Florida* ruled Florida's death sentencing process unconstitutional under the Sixth Amendment—which guarantees the right to a speedy and public trial, the right to an impartial jury and the right to legal counsel, among other protections—did

Grim file a motion for postconviction relief. However, the Florida Supreme Court affirmed the denial of that claim in 2018 because his original jury recommendation was unanimous.

The legal representation crisis seen in Grim's final days is echoed in other Florida cases due to Governor DeSantis' rapid pace of issuing death warrants.

- Bryan Jennings, a 66-year-old US Marine Corps veteran scheduled for execution on November 13, 2025, has been housed on death row for nearly 45 years. Jennings was left without any state-appointed attorney for over three years, despite Florida law guaranteeing continuous state postconviction counsel for death-sentenced individuals.

- The execution of Curtis Windom on August 28, 2025 focused attention on the accelerating pace of executions in Florida. His attorneys argued that the postconviction defense bar was "overwhelmed by an unprecedented number of death warrants" being signed "every two weeks." Due to the tight schedule imposed by Windom's death warrant, his attorneys reported they had only one day to consult with him in a meaningful manner before the court-imposed deadline for filing motions.

Arbitrary power of the Florida governor

Florida stands out nationwide for its execution process, largely due to the extraordinary power vested in the executive branch. The governor of Florida holds the sole authority to select and set the execution dates for inmates on death row. He can also grant a stay for any reason at any time, a power he has yet to exercise.

This process is criticized for being opaque and shrouded in secrecy. Governor DeSantis alone decides who among those sentenced to death will be executed and when, and he has refused to provide the public with any explanation for his decisions. This contrasts with most other states where the courts are heavily involved in the issuing of death warrants.

This arbitrariness is compounded by serious allegations of racial bias in DeSantis' warrant signing. A civil suit filed on behalf of Kayle Barrington Bates, executed August 19, 2025, alleged that Florida's

execution warrant process "is infected with racial discrimination and unconstitutional arbitrariness." Statistical analysis presented in the suit noted that 95 percent of the executions authorized by DeSantis involved white victims. The complaint argued that a defendant convicted of killing a white victim is over 15 times more likely to be executed under DeSantis' administration than a defendant whose victims are not white. Bates' lawsuit also pointed out that DeSantis has not executed a single white defendant for killing a non-white defendant. The governor's motion to dismiss the lawsuit denied any discriminatory effect or purpose.

The systemic flaws in Florida's death penalty system carry the catastrophic risk of executing the innocent. Florida has already dropped charges against a staggering 30 death row prisoners since 1973, more than any other state. Opponents argue that this frequent rate of exonerations adds to the moral argument against the practice and highlights the unacceptable risk of executing innocent people—as well as the near certainty that this has already happened.

With Grim's execution, 41 people have been put to death in state execution chambers across the US, the most since 2012. This pace has been driven by four states, Florida, Texas, Alabama and South Carolina, which have carried out three-quarters of these state killings. The US is on track to carry out 46 executions in 2025, a number not seen since 2012.



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