

# Oklahoma death row inmate receives rare commutation, followed by executions in Florida and South Carolina

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Just hours before Tremane Wood was scheduled to die by lethal injection on Thursday, November 13, 2025, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt granted him clemency, commuting his sentence to life in prison without parole. Wood, 46, had been condemned to die for his role in the 2001 fatal stabbing of 19-year-old farmworker Ronnie Wipf during a botched armed robbery at an Oklahoma City motel.

While Tremane Wood's attorneys did not deny his participation in the robbery, they maintained that his older brother, Zjaiton "Jake" Wood, was the one who delivered the fatal blow. Jake Wood testified in his younger brother's defense prior to his own trial. He said he stabbed Wipf with a knife and that his brother had not been at the motel, a claim contradicted by other testimony. Jake Wood had confessed to the murder and received a sentence of life without parole. He died by suicide in prison in 2019.

At his last-minute clemency hearing, the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board voted 3-2 to recommend mercy. The board cited possible prosecutorial misconduct and, critically, Tremane Wood's grossly ineffective trial attorney, John Albert, who admitted to drinking heavily and using cocaine during the trial. Albert later apologized to Wood, writing, "I'm sorry," and noting, "You got me at a bad time."

Governor Stitt, a Republican supporter of the death penalty who has previously ignored clemency recommendations for four other men, chose to accept the board's recommendation after "prayerful consideration." Stitt said his action ensured that Wood received "the same punishment his brother received." Wood's clemency marks only the second time Stitt has intervened in nearly seven years in office, during which time 16 men have been executed.

## Florida

Bryan Jennings, a former US Marine, was executed by lethal injection at 6:20 p.m. local time on Thursday, November 13,

2025. He was put to death for the 1979 rape and murder of 6-year-old Rebecca Kunash on Merritt Island.

Jennings was the record 16th inmate executed in Florida in 2025, a nation-leading total that doubles the state's previous record of eight executions set in 2014.

Jennings, 20, home on leave from the Marine Corps, confessed that he went drinking, looked into windows—which he "always had this thing to look into"—and then took the sleeping first-grader from her bedroom window. After abducting her and driving her to a nearby canal, Jennings raped her, smashed her head into ground, fracturing her skull, before holding her under water until she drowned.

When asked for any last words before receiving the lethal injection, Jennings declined. Florida utilizes a three-drug cocktail of a sedative, a paralytic and a drug to stop the heart. After the drugs were administered, Jennings twitched and his chest heaved for a few minutes. Though the procedure was declared without complications by the Department of Corrections, other reporters noted it took longer than is typical.

During his third trial, Jennings' mother told jurors he never knew his biological father and was a "problem child from birth," describing him as "very destructive and hyperactive." She recounted wanting to admit him to a mental hospital in Boston on a doctor's recommendation, but she changed her mind, fearing the stigma would prevent him from joining the military.

More recently, Jennings' lawyers argued he was left without representation for months after his counsel died in 2022, which they contended denied him due process and monitoring of his mental health. The Florida Supreme Court rejected this contention. The US Supreme Court denied Jennings' last-minute appeal for a stay of execution.

Jennings, a former US Marine, was one of six veterans executed in Florida so far this year. Also put to death were:

- Edward James: executed March 20, 2025. US Army veteran convicted for the murder of an eight-year-old girl and her grandmother in 1993.
- Jeffrey Hutchinson: executed May 1, 2025. US Army Ranger who served during the Gulf War, convicted of the

murder of his girlfriend and her three children in 1998.

- Edward Zakrzewski: executed July 31, 2025. US Air Force technical sergeant in Korea, convicted of the murder of his wife and two children in 1994.

- Kayle Bates: executed August 19, 2025. National Guardsman deployed during the 1980 Miami riots, convicted for the 1982 murder, kidnapping, armed robbery and attempted sexual battery of a woman in Bay County.

- Norman Grim Jr.: executed October 28, 2025. US Navy, convicted for the 1998 rape and murder of his neighbor.

The executions of these veterans are a demonstration of the US military's brutality in its imperialist exploits around the world, the impact on those sent to do the fighting, and the callousness with which the government is willing to send them to their deaths after they have served their tours.

Governor Ron DeSantis has ordered more executions in a single year than any Florida governor since US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976. DeSantis justifies the unprecedented rate by arguing that he seeks to deliver long-delayed justice to victims' families for crimes committed decades ago, stating, "Justice delayed is justice denied."

The acceleration of state killings by DeSantis is politically motivated, following the lead of President Trump, who signed an executive order on January 20, Inauguration Day, titled "Restoring the Death Penalty and Protecting Public Safety." The order:

- Rescinded the moratorium on federal executions put in place by the Department of Justice in 2021.
- Directed the US attorney general to pursue the death penalty in all applicable federal cases.
- Specifically required the death penalty to be sought for murders of law enforcement officers and for capital crimes committed by undocumented immigrants, regardless of other factors.
- Encouraged the attorney general to help states maintain access to lethal injection drugs and to assist in carrying out state-level executions.
- Calling for efforts to overturn Supreme Court precedents that limit state and federal authority to impose capital punishment.

## South Carolina

On Friday, November 14, 2025, South Carolina executed Stephen Bryant, the third inmate in the state to die by firing squad in 2025. Bryant is the third man executed by this controversial method in South Carolina in 2025. Prior to this year, only Utah had used the firing squad in modern history, doing so in 1977, 1996 and 2010.

Bryant was convicted for the murder of three people during

an eight-day killing spree in 2004. He received the death penalty for the murder of Willard "T.J." Tietjen, who was shot nine times after allowing Bryant into his home. After the murder, Bryant used Tietjen's blood to scrawl a taunting message on the wall: "Victem 4 in 2 weeks. Catch me if u can."

Bryant's attorneys argued he was deeply troubled in the months leading up to the crimes, having begged for help from a probation agent and his aunt because he was obsessed with thoughts of being sexually abused as a child by relatives. He attempted to cope using meth and smoking marijuana sprayed with bug killer.

Bryant was executed at the Broad River Correctional Institution in Columbia. He made no last words. He was strapped to a chair and a hood placed over his head. A red bull's-eye target was placed over his heart. Three volunteer corrections officers fired at him with high-powered rifles from 15 feet away. The 44-year-old was declared dead at 6:05 p.m.

South Carolina legalized the firing squad in 2021. The state executed two inmates by this method earlier this year; Brad Sigmon was the first to die, on March 7, 2025.

Witnesses said there was no warning before the executioners fired their weapons simultaneously at about 6:05 p.m. After Sigmon was shot, he appeared to take two short breaths and a blood stain appeared on his chest. He was pronounced dead about three minutes after the shots were fired. In a statement, his lawyer, Gerald "Bo" King, said that Sigmon's death was "horrifying and violent."

An autopsy photo of Mikal Mahdi, who died by firing squad April 11, showed only two distinct wounds. Dr. Jonathan Arden, a pathologist, stated, "The evidence indicates that he was struck by only two bullets, not the prescribed three. Consequently, the nature of the internal injuries from the gunshot wounds resulted in a more prolonged death process."

Arden said it was likely it could have taken 30 to 60 seconds for Mahdi to lose consciousness, during which time Mahdi would have suffered excruciating pain as his lungs tried to expand against a broken sternum and he experienced "air hunger" as his lungs failed to inhale oxygen.

Bryant was the 43rd inmate executed in the US this year, a number not seen since 2012.



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