

URGENT ACTION

INMATE FOUND HANGED DAYS BEFORE EXECUTION

Billy Slagle, who was scheduled to be executed on 7 August, was found hanged in his cell on the morning of 4 August. He was pronounced dead about an hour after he was found. He had been denied clemency, but litigation in the courts was still underway.

Billy Slagle was sentenced to death in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, in 1988 for the murder of his 40-year-old neighbour Mari Anne Pope who died from multiple stab wounds inflicted after she awoke to an intruder in her home in the early hours of 13 August 1987. Billy Slagle, apprehended at the scene, was 18 years old at the time of the crime.

The office of Governor John Kasich announced on 24 July that he had “denied a request for executive clemency” from Billy Slagle. The announcement gave no further elaboration on the decision, which followed a 6-4 recommendation by the parole board on 16 July recommending that he deny clemency.

Billy Slagle had asked for his death sentence to be commuted to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Among those supporting clemency was the current prosecutor of Cuyahoga County, and one of the Ohio Supreme Court judges who dissented from that court’s affirmation of Billy Slagle’s death sentence in 1992. A federal judge issued a strong dissent in the case in 2006 on the grounds of the prosecutorial misconduct that she said had “infected” the trial.

At about 5am on 4 August, Billy Slagle was found hanged in his cell at the Chillicothe Correctional Institution. He had been due to go on around-the-clock watch at 10am that day and for the 72 hours prior to the scheduled execution, for which he would have been moved to the Southern Correctional Facility. A spokesperson for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has said that there will be a “complete investigation” into the death.

In the parole board’s decision against clemency on 16 July 2013, one of the members who voted for clemency wrote: “Slagle’s age and immaturity at the time of the offense significantly mitigate his sentence in this horrible crime. Evolving standards of decency as well as medical, scientific, and sociological studies suggest that a penalty as final and irrevocable as death should not be imposed upon an individual who, like Slagle, retained the capacity for significant maturation and change at the time he or she committed the crime. Slagle’s capacity for maturation and change at the time of his offense is evidenced by his positive institutional adjustment.”

Billy Slagle told the clemency board that he was very remorseful for the murder of Mari Anne Pope and that he understood the effects of his actions upon her family. He also apologized to his own family for what he had put them through. He had been incarcerated for all but eight months of his adult life, and had spent the past quarter of a century on death row. Since denial of his clemency petition, his lawyers had been litigating in the courts to seek a new trial and a stay of execution.

There have been 22 executions in the USA this year, and 1,342 nationwide since the US Supreme Court allowed executions to resume under revised capital statutes. Ohio accounts for 51 of these executions, two of which have been carried out this year.

No further appeals by the UA Network are requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the second update of UA 189/13. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/052/2013/en>

Name: Billy Slagle

Gender m/f: M

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