

URGENT ACTION

MISSOURI GOVERNOR COMMUTES DEATH SENTENCE

The Governor of Missouri commuted the death sentence of Kimber Edwards to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole four days before he was due to be put to death.

Kimber Edwards was scheduled to be executed on 6 October for the murder in 2000 of his former wife, Kimberly Cantrell. After the murder, police had arrested Orthell Wilson and charged him with first-degree murder, after he was identified as the man who had been seen outside Kimberly Cantrell's apartment shortly before she was killed. Orthell Wilson implicated Kimber Edwards and he too was charged.

At his trial, Kimber Edwards denied that he had any connection to the murder. Orthell Wilson did not testify, but statements he had given to the police were heard by the jury. The jury found Kimber Edwards guilty of first-degree murder and voted for the death penalty after a sentencing hearing that lasted less than a day. Orthell Wilson pleaded guilty in exchange for not facing the death penalty. He was sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

On 8 May 2015, Orthell Wilson signed an affidavit recanting his statements implicating Kimber Edwards, claiming he made them under police pressure and the threat of the death penalty, and that "I alone killed Kimberly Cantrell... Kimber Edwards is completely innocent and was not involved in any way in the murder". He stated that in 2000 he was in a "secret romantic relationship" with Kimberly Cantrell and that he had shot her in the context of an argument over his "drug addiction and constant need for money". Three of his neighbours from that time have signed affidavits stating that they knew of the relationship between Orthell Wilson and Kimberly Cantrell.

In a statement issued on 2 October, Governor Jay Nixon said: "After a thorough review of the facts surrounding the murder of Kimberly Cantrell, I am convinced the evidence supports the jury's decision to convict Kimber Edwards of first-degree murder. At the same time, however, I am using my authority under the Missouri Constitution to commute Edwards' sentence to life without the possibility of parole. This is a step not taken lightly, and only after significant consideration of the totality of the circumstances. With this decision, Kimber Edwards will remain in prison for the remainder of his life for this murder."

Since 1976, more than 140 wrongful convictions in capital cases have been uncovered in the USA, a period that has seen 1,416 executions. There have been 22 executions in the USA this year, six of them in Missouri. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, unconditionally. Today, some 140 countries are abolitionist in law or practice.

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

This is the first update on UA: 207/15. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/2514/2015/en/

Name: Kimber Edwards

Gender m/f: m

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