

PUBLIC

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Further information on EXTRA 182/99 (AMR 51/215/99, 22 December 1999) -  
Death penalty

USA (Texas) Larry Keith Robison, aged 42

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Larry Robison was executed in Texas on 21 January 2000. He had been sentenced to death for the murder of Bruce Gardner in 1982.

Larry Robison never denied killing Bruce Gardner or four other people on the same day (murders for which he was never tried), but always maintained they were the result of his severe mental illness, including auditory and visual hallucinations. Several years before the crime he had been diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. His family tried repeatedly to get him appropriate treatment before he turned violent, but the state mental health services failed to provide it. His mother, Lois Robison, has campaigned tirelessly on behalf of her son since he was sentenced to death.

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill appealed to Governor Bush to grant clemency: "The tragedy of this case could have been so easily prevented had Mr Robison received the treatment he desperately needed 18 years ago. Please do not compound the tragedy of his crimes and the failures of the mental health system with the cruelty of a criminal justice system that lacks compassion." Governor Bush has sought to characterize his governorship and presidential bid with the slogan "compassionate conservatism".

Shortly before the execution, a spokesperson for the Governor was quoted in the *Washington Post* as saying that it was not the Governor's job to make judgments about the mental competency of inmates. The spokesperson noted that Governor Bush had pushed for increased funding for mental health services and was not responsible for any inadequacies in Larry Robison's early treatment: "You'd have to talk to the people who were governors in the 70s about what the state was doing back then". Amnesty International believes such statements represent a shameful abrogation of a leader's responsibility to respect fundamental standards of human rights and human decency.

In opposing the execution, the *Dallas Morning News* noted that Texas ranks 48<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 US states for investment in services for the mentally ill. In an editorial, the newspaper wrote: "Executing a criminal who suffered from mental illness before he murdered and who lacked the resources for psychiatric care serves no public purpose."

The European Union and the Vatican were among the bodies which appealed for clemency.

Larry Robison becomes the ninth person to be executed in the USA in 2000 and the 607<sup>th</sup> overall since the USA resumed executions in 1977. Two hundred and three of those executions have been carried out in Texas; more than half have taken place under the Governorship of George W. Bush.

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