

PUBLIC

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Death penalty

12 August 2004

USA (Texas)

James Vernon Allridge (m), black, aged 41

James Allridge is scheduled to be executed in Texas on 26 August 2004. He was sentenced to death in 1987 for the murder of a convenience store worker two years earlier.

Brian Clendennen, a 20-year-old white male, was shot dead during the robbery of a Circle K store in Fort Worth on 4 February 1985. A jury convicted James Allridge of the murder and found that the defendant would likely commit future criminal acts of violence that would constitute a continuing threat to society if he was allowed to live, even in prison. In Texas, a jury has to answer this "future dangerousness" question in the affirmative before a death sentence can be passed.

James Allridge was 22 years old at the time of the crime. He is now 41, having spent 17 years on death row. He is appealing for clemency on the grounds of his rehabilitation. He is said to have accepted responsibility for his crime and to be genuinely remorseful for his actions. His claim of rehabilitation is supported by a veteran official of the Texas prison system, and two former death row guards and several jurors from his trial are supporting his request for clemency.

S.O. Woods worked for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Institutions Division (TDCJ-ID) for 31 years, rising to the level of Assistant Director as well as Chairman of the TDCJ-ID's Classification Committee. He has reviewed James Allridge's prison records and concluded that he poses no threat to prison staff or other inmates. He concluded that "there's really no reason not to place him in general [inmate] population".

Two former death row prison guards support James Allridge's petition for clemency. One has said: "James was the kind of prisoner that made everybody's life easier as far as being able to work around the death row inmates. James probably saved a lot of correctional officers' lives and they didn't even know it, just by calming the situation. James is deserving of clemency because he is the perfect role model inmate. I think if James was put back in [general inmate] population he would continue to be a good role model prisoner." A second guard has stated in an affidavit filed with the clemency petition that "James would not be a threat to society if his death sentence were to be commuted to a life sentence. I am in favour of James being granted clemency."

At least four of the jurors who sentenced James Allridge to death also support his request for clemency, based on his efforts towards rehabilitation, and his model behaviour in prison. In video testimony presented with the clemency petition, one of the jurors states: "I really hope for James, for his sake and for others that he's touched in his time in prison, I really hope that he gets clemency and that he can just continue being a good example to other people."

Other people, including family members, a former employer, people with whom he has corresponded over the years and other inmates, have also provided testimony in support of clemency. In prison James Allridge is reported to help younger inmates adjust to prison in a productive and non-violent way, and to have become an accomplished artist.

In 1990 in Georgia, William Moore's death sentence was commuted. Among the reasons cited by the clemency board was Moore's exemplary prison record and remorse. In 1997 in Virginia, William Saunders's death sentence was commuted on the grounds of his rehabilitation. The judge and prosecutor from the trial supported clemency. In 2004, Willie Hall's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. The Georgia clemency board cited Hall's exemplary prison record in its decision.

In Texas, the Governor can grant clemency if the Board of Pardons and Paroles recommends that he do so. The Governor also has the power to grant temporary reprieves.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and all cases. Today, 117 countries are abolitionist in law or practice. Since executions resumed in the USA in 1977, 922 people have been executed nationwide. Texas accounts for 323 of these executions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language, in your own words:

- expressing sympathy for the family and friends of Brian Clendennen, and explaining that you are not seeking to excuse the manner of his death or to minimize the suffering it will have caused;
- noting that James Allridge has accepted responsibility for the crime and is said to be genuinely remorseful;
- noting that at least four of the jurors who voted for a death sentence on the basis that James Allridge would be a future danger to society, even in prison, now support clemency on the basis of his exemplary prison record and his efforts to achieve rehabilitation;
- noting that support for his clemency petition also come from two prison guards and that his claim of rehabilitation is supported by a veteran of the Texas prison system, S.O. Woods;
- urging the Board of Pardons and Paroles to recommend that the Governor commute James Allridge's death sentence;
- urging the Governor to accept such a recommendation, or in the event that the Board votes against clemency, to use his power of reprieve to stop the execution and request that the Board reconsider.

APPEALS TO: (Note: In all appeals please include James Allridge's prison number: #870)

Rissie Owens, Presiding Officer, Board of Pardons and Paroles, 1300 11th St., Suite 520, P.O. Box 599, Huntsville, TX 77342-0599, USA

Fax: +1 936 291 8367, Salutation: Dear Ms Owens

Elvis Hightower, Board Member, Board of Pardons and Paroles, 1300 11th St., Suite 520, P.O. Box 599, Huntsville, TX 77342-0599, USA

Fax: +1 936 291 8367, Salutation: Dear Mr Hightower

Charles Aycock, Board of Pardons and Paroles, 5809 S. Western, Suite 237, Amarillo, TX 79110, USA

Fax: +1 806 358 6455, Salutation: Dear Mr Aycock

Linda Garcia, Board of Pardons and Paroles, 1212 N. Velasco, Suite 201, Angleton, TX 77515, USA

Fax: +1 979 849 8741, Salutation: Dear Ms Garcia

Juanita Gonzalez, Board of Pardons and Paroles, 3408 S. State Hwy. 36, Gatesville, TX 76528, USA

Fax: +1 254 865 2629, Salutation: Dear Ms Gonzalez

Jose L. Aliseda, Board of Pardons and Paroles, 1111 West Lacy St., Palestine, TX 75801, USA

Fax: +1 903 723 1441, Salutation: Dear Mr Aliseda

Governor Rick Perry, Office of the Governor, PO Box 12428, Austin, Texas 78711-2428, USA

Fax: +1 512 463 1849, Email via webpage: <http://www.governor.state.tx.us/contact#contactinfo>

Salutation: Dear Governor

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the USA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.