

TCADP Execution Alert: Support clemency for Ramiro Gonzales

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Ramiro Gonzales is scheduled to be executed by the State of Texas on July 13, 2022, for the murder of Bridget Townsend, an offense he committed when he was just 18 years old. At the time, Gonzales was gripped by a serious drug addiction rooted in prenatal substance exposure and childhood trauma, abuse, and neglect. Now, after 15 years on death row, he is a different person, as evidenced by the fact that even the State's trial expert now believes he "does not pose a risk of future danger to society," a determination that is required for a jury to impose a death sentence in Texas. Gonzales accepts responsibility for his crimes and has sought to atone for them.

In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roper v. Simmons* that it is unconstitutional to impose a death sentence on individuals under the age of 18 at the time of the offense. Since that time, scientific research has continued to show that brains do not fully mature until the early-to-mid-twenties, which means that no one can predict whether an 18-year-old will be dangerous in the future.



Photo courtesy of The Gonzales Family

Texas is virtually alone in the United States in executing persons who were teenagers at the time of their offense. More teenaged defendants have been executed in Texas than in any other state. In fact, only four other states have executed more persons *of any age* than Texas has executed people who were teenagers at the time of the offense.

Gonzales has filed an application for clemency with the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles and Governor Greg Abbott in which he asks for the commutation of his death sentence to a lesser penalty or, in the alternative, a 180-day reprieve to allow him to fulfill his desire to be a kidney donor.

Email the members of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles at bpp_clemency@tdcj.texas.gov by Friday, July 8, 2022 to urge clemency for Ramiro Gonzales. Include his TDCJ # 999513 and DOB 11/05/1982 in your appeals. Share your concerns with Governor Greg Abbott. You can adapt one of our sample messages or use the talking points to craft your own note. Contact information for the Board and Governor is below.

Thank you for raising your voice in opposition to all executions in Texas.

Key talking points about Ramiro Gonzales

- Just 71 days past his 18th birthday at the time of the offense for which he was sentenced to die, Ramiro Gonzales is one of the youngest persons to be sentenced to death in the United States since the Supreme Court held in 2005 that the Constitution bars imposition of the death penalty on anyone under the age of 18.
- The scientific and societal rationales for exempting juveniles from the death penalty apply equally to older teenage defendants like Gonzales.
- His childhood was marked by trauma, abuse, and neglect. Much of this mitigation evidence was not presented to the jury by his court-appointed attorneys, who failed to provide any context for his impulsive behavior and acts of violence.
- Away from the traumatic environment of his youth, Gonzales has grown up in prison and is now a mature and peaceful adult. In recent interviews, death row prison guards have described him as “sensitive,” “genuinely” changed, a “good communicator,” and as someone who they “feel safe around” and who is “never problematic.”
- The mental health expert who testified for the prosecution at trial that Gonzales would present a future danger—even if incarcerated—has recently re-evaluated him after 15 years on death row and now concludes that Gonzales does not present a danger to anyone.
- In the 15 years he has been on death row, Gonzales has devoted himself to self-improvement, contemplation, and prayer. He is devoutly religious and shares his practice with spiritual advisors and with others on death row. Gonzales takes full responsibility for his crimes and has sought to atone for them and to seek redemption, expressing his genuine remorse in both words and actions.
- A 180-day reprieve would allow Gonzales to donate a kidney to a person in critical need of a vital organ transplant—a process he has been pursuing for over a year—and enable him to atone for the life he has taken by helping to save a life.

Sample email message #1

Dear Chairman Gutiérrez and Members of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles,

I am writing to urge you to recommend clemency to Ramiro Gonzales (TDCJ # 999513 and DOB 11/05/1982), who is scheduled to be executed on July 13, 2022. Barely 18 years old at the time of the crime for which he was sentenced to die, Gonzales is one of the youngest persons to be sentenced to death in the United States since the Supreme Court held in 2005 that the Constitution bars imposition of the death penalty on anyone under the age of 18.

Scientific research shows that our brains do not fully mature until we reach our early-to-mid-twenties, and yet Texas requires jurors to determine “future dangerousness” when deciding whether to impose a death sentence. In Gonzales’s case, that prediction has proven to be patently false – so much so that the State’s own trial expert now concludes that Gonzales does not present a danger to anyone.

Based on his age at the time of the crime, his growth and maturity during his 15 years on death row, and his deep remorse for taking the life of Bridget Townsend, Ramiro Gonzales is deserving of clemency. I implore you to recommend the commutation of his death sentence.

Sample email message #2

Dear Chairman Gutiérrez and Members of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles,

I am writing in support of clemency for Ramiro Gonzales (TDCJ # 999513 and DOB 11/05/1982), who faces execution by the State of Texas on July 13, 2022. Gonzales has expressed his sincere remorse for the murder of Bridget Townsend, an offense he committed when he was just 18 years old and addicted to drugs.

In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it is unconstitutional to execute individuals under the age of 18 at the time of the offense. I believe the same factors that guided the Justices in that decision apply to Gonzales's case, as there is no real difference between the brain of 17-year-olds and people under the age of 21 when it comes to maturity, impulse control, and the ability to make rational decisions. Those brain functions are at the core of a jury's evaluation of future dangerousness, which is required for the imposition of a death sentence in Texas.

Now, the mental health expert who testified for the prosecution at trial that Gonzales would present a future danger has re-evaluated him after 15 years on death row and concluded that Gonzales does not present a danger to anyone. Several guards on death row have attested to his compliant behavior and positive impact on those around him.

Through the clemency process, you can compensate for the rigidities of the judicial system, which does not have a meaningful way to review the accuracy of "future dangerousness" determinations at trial. I implore you to exercise your power to recommend that Governor Abbott commute Gonzales's death sentence to a lesser punishment in consideration of the factors cited above. In calling for mercy for Gonzales, I do not condone his actions, but I do believe he deserves a second chance.

Contact information for the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles and Governor Abbott**Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles**

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Texas Governor Greg Abbott

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Information and Referral Hotline: (800) 843-5789 [for Texas callers]

Information and Referral and Opinion Hotline: (512) 463-1782 [for Austin, Texas and out-of-state callers]

Office of the Governor Main Switchboard: 512-463-2000

Online Contact: <https://gov.texas.gov/contact/>