



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

PRESS RELEASE

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**PAROLE BOARD RECOMMENDS RELEASE OF COUNTY MAN
CONVICTED OF TORTURING AND MURDERING TEEN**

On October 6, 2020, a California parole board recommended the release of convicted murderer Gerardo Zavala, 48, over the strident objection of prosecutors. Parole was first recommended for Zavala 2017, but was overturned by former Governor Jerry Brown in 2018 after prosecutors appealed the decision.

On January 24, 2001, Zavala and two others lured 17-year-old African-American minor Eric Jones to a Delano residence to smoke meth. When they arrived, they went in to the garage where others were waiting. The group jumped Jones while hurling racial epithets and accused him of conspiring to steal their property. Threatening Jones with an AK-47, the group began to brutally torture him with electrocution from live wires, repeatedly inserted a squeegee handle into his rectum, and beat him with a pipe – all crimes assisted by Zavala. After hours of torture, Jones was bound in duct tape and thrown into a car trunk, taken to a remote road outside Allensworth, and shot 10 times at point-blank range, killing him. He was found with the words “Pepe’s Bitch” written on his back. Zavala was arrested on January 28, 2001, and confessed to being part of the torture and murder.

Assistant District Attorney David Alavezos prosecuted five of the men involved in the mid-2000’s, and argued against Zavala’s release at the hearing. Alavezos described the crime scene as “the worst I have ever seen.” A jury convicted Zavala in 2006 of second-degree murder, torture, and kidnapping. He was sentenced to 18 years-to-life in prison. Co-defendants Jorge Vidal, Keith Seriales, and Daniel Portugal were sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. Another co-defendant, Tyrone Ebaniz, was sentenced to

15 years in prison for kidnapping and assault with a deadly weapon. Brothers Juan and Gerardo Soto, also involved in the crime, are believed to have fled to Mexico.

“In 2020 we have witnessed the tidal wave of commentary and protests that purport police officers are what is wrong with our justice system in America. Instead, decisions like this should remind us that the complete dismissal of the gravity of crime and the impact it has on victims, their families, and our communities is the glaring problem with our justice system,” said Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward. “Unless Governor Newsom overturns the parole board’s recommendation, another murderer will be released. How the board failed to take a stand for Eric, an innocent 17-year-old young man who was brutally tortured, sodomized, and executed, is beyond comprehension. We will again be appealing to the Governor to overturn this decision.”

Residents can contact Governor Newsom at 916-445-2841 or through his website at <https://govapps.gov.ca.gov/gov40mail/>.

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