



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

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**PRESS RELEASE**

1/25/21

**GOVERNOR TAKES NO ACTION TO PREVENT RELEASE OF  
CONVICTED KILLER**

On January 15, 2021, the Office of the District Attorney was notified that Governor Gavin Newsom has refused to stop the release of convicted murderer Gerardo Zavala, 48. In 2001, Zavala and a group of men lured a 17-year-old African-American minor to a Delano residence where they beat, electrocuted, sexually assaulted, and eventually shot him and left him on the side of the road near Allensworth.

A California parole board first recommended Zavala's release in 2017, but was overturned by former Governor Jerry Brown in 2018 after prosecutors appealed the decision. The board again recommended parole in October 2020 despite the fervent objection of prosecutors.

The following contains graphic information.

On January 24, 2001, Zavala and two others lured the victim, 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.

"Twenty years ago this week, Eric Jones' life was violently cut short. Now, instead of taking this time to remember him, his family has to process this heartless decision. The Governor has ignored the pleas of this office, the pleas of this community, and has even turned a blind eye to the wisdom of his predecessor, Governor Jerry Brown, who saw through the manipulation and deception of Zavala's previous bid for release," said Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward. "It is a sad day for families who have had to endure the loss of a loved one due to violent crime. How Governor Newsom refused to take a stand for Eric, an innocent 17-year-old young man who was brutally tortured, sodomized, and executed, is beyond comprehension."

According to information provided to the Office of the District Attorney by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Zavala currently possesses an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) hold. It is unclear at this time how recent federal executive orders regarding deportations will impact Zavala's release. For questions or concerns, the public is urged to contact Governor Newsom's office at (916) 445-2841 or <https://govapps.gov.ca.gov/gov40mail/>.

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