



For Immediate Release
Press Release for 3/5/2025

Contact: Blair Fitzgibbon: blair@soundspeedpr.com, 202-503-6141

Firing Squad Returns As Execution Method Brother of Last Man Executed by Firing Squad Among Those Protesting South Carolina Execution on Friday

Columbia, SC - As states with the death penalty grapple with alternatives to lethal injection, both new and old execution methods are front and center as Friday's firing squad execution in South Carolina approaches. The Ohio House Judiciary Committee heard sponsor testimony this morning for a bill to enact nitrogen gas suffocation as a viable means of executing prisoners in Ohio. Arkansas's House Judiciary Committee advanced a similar bill last week. Also today in Idaho, the Idaho Senate gave final approval to a bill to make the firing squad the primary method of execution in that state, sending the bill on to Idaho Governor Brad Little for his signature.

"For us, it's not about how we kill our prisoners," said Abraham Bonowitz, executive director of Death Penalty Action. "The concern we have is that we allow our government to conduct executions at all when the capital punishment system is so costly, discriminatory, inaccurate and disproportionately used."

Execution Protests in the Coming Weeks

With six executions scheduled over the next three weeks in six different states, Death Penalty Action announced today that it will participate in protests outside the prisons in four of those states while conducting a live virtual vigil via Zoom for each of the executions. Executions are scheduled via firing squad in SC on March 7, lethal injection in Texas on March 13, gas suffocation in Louisiana on March 18 (first execution in 15 years), and by lethal injection in Arizona on March 19, and Oklahoma and Florida on March 20. See the execution schedule and case details [here](#).

Survivors of Gun Violence Victims Speaking Out

Death Penalty Action leaders will join protesters outside Broad River Correctional Facility in Columbia, South Carolina on Friday starting at 4:30pm ET. Among those expected to be present and available for in-person and advance interviews at the first firing squad execution since 2010 will be the following, each of whom has lost a loved one to gun violence:

- Randy Gardner, an Advisory Committee Member of Death Penalty Action. Gardner's brother, Ronnie Lee Gardner, was the most recent prisoner executed by firing squad in the United States, in 2010 in Utah. Gardner is available in Columbia, SC on Thursday and Friday this week.

- Rev. Sharon Risher, board chairperson of Death Penalty Action. Rev. Risher's mother and two cousins were among those murdered in the racially motivated mass shooting at Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC in 2015. The shooter in that case awaits execution on federal death row.
- Charles Keith, Impacted Communities Liaison for Death Penalty Action. Charles's brother Durad was shot to death in a home invasion in Canton, Ohio in a 2007 murder that remains unsolved.

"I saw what the bullets did to my brother," said Gardner. "I was there when it happened and I have the autopsy photos. It makes me sick to think that in today's world Mr. Sigmond had to choose between lethal injection, electric chair, or the firing squad as the method by which South Carolina will execute him in a matter of days. The death penalty only creates more victims. There is no humane way to execute anyone."

Touring with The Delaware Bell

Death Penalty Action staff and volunteers will be present outside the prisons to protest executions this month in South Carolina, Texas, Louisiana and Florida with "The Delaware Bell," a bell that has been rung outside most of the 16 executions that took place in Delaware between 1992 and 2012.

Delaware's death penalty laws were ruled unconstitutional and thrown out in 2016. After Delaware legislators scrubbed all language pertaining to executions from the state code in 2024, Delaware Citizens Opposed to the Death Penalty gave their bell to Death Penalty Action for use in protests at executions across the United States as part of the [For Whom the Bells Toll](#) project, which calls on communities of faith to toll their bells at the time of executions.

"The Delaware Bell has proven to be a connective element of prayerful protest that over 100 abolitionists have joined in so far at protests in Delaware, Indiana, Oklahoma and Alabama," said Bonowitz. "Hundreds more will get their chance in the coming weeks."

Background on the use of the firing squad in the United States:

- Since 1976, only three executions by firing squad have been carried out, all in Utah.
- In 2004, Utah abolished the firing squad. It was not retroactive, therefore those sentenced before the ban could still elect that method.
- The last execution by firing squad was that of [Ronnie Lee Gardner](#) in 2010.
- In 2015, Utah [reinstated the firing squad](#) as a backup method in the case that lethal injection drugs are unavailable.
- In 2021, Governor McMaster of South Carolina signed a bill into law allowing the [electric chair and firing squad](#) to serve as alternative methods to lethal injection.
- In March 2025, the Idaho Senate passed a bill to make the firing squad the primary execution method. That bill awaits a signature from Idaho governor Brad Little.

###