

Dear Governor Greg Abbott:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Mr. Rodney Reed, a man currently on Texas Death Row and has been scheduled to be executed by lethal injection on March 5, 2015. Spending 28 years inside the Illinois Department of Corrections for a crime that I never committed from age 16 has provided me with a clear and concise forecast of the criminal justice system. It has serious issues that have caused many to linger inside a prison for decades before being proven innocent while some have been executed such as *Cameron Todd Willingham, Frances Newton and Carlos DeLuna*. In Chicago I was tortured by police detectives that were subordinates to *Jon Burge* a commander that tortured confessions from criminal suspects inside police interrogation rooms. The entire criminal justice system did not believe my claims and they refuted the claims of many men that were victims of Burge. Some were even placed on death row. I was sentenced to natural life as a juvenile offender without all possibilities of parole because I was 16 years old and could not be sentenced to the death penalty because of the age requirement of 18 years of age. If that age requirement was non-existent, I would have been placed on death row and perhaps dead this day.

Since I was found guilty, sentenced and railroaded to prison in 1982 and told that I would die behind the walls of an Illinois prison, it has been my position that *innocence must matter*. All across this country greater prominence has been placed upon *guilt*, while little has been shown toward *innocence*, despite 150 people across this country being found innocent all while sentenced to die on death row. It has been America's position that the system is flawed even if one innocent person is sentenced to prison wrongfully. Currently Texas has carried out 521 executions--more than any other State across this country. In Texas just last year 39 people were exonerated of crimes they had been accused of committing. They spent time behind the walls of a prison, they suffered psychological and emotional abuse, all while forced to follow prison rules that provide them no form of humanity.

Mr. Reed is someone who was linked to the murder of *Stacey Stites*, which occurred in 1996 within the jurisdiction of Bastrop, Texas. He was taken into police custody based off of DNA in semen found in the body of Stites. Reed understood that Stites was engaged to a Giddings police officer *Jimmy Fennell*, when asked if he knew Stites, Reed denied any knowledge of her. Reed was charged with the murder of Stites and subsequently found guilty and sentenced to death based solely upon his denial of knowing Stites. Fennell was the prime suspect.

Reed was arrested despite there being substantial evidence that linked Stites' boyfriend *Fennell* to her murder. *Fennell* failed two polygraph examinations in connection to the murder of Stites, *Fennell* was overheard by colleagues before the Stites murder, stating that he would strangle his girlfriend if he was to ever learn of infidelity on her part. Stites was found strangled in a field in the town of Bastrop. Reed was provided ineffective legal representation at the trial level, while being denied meaningful access to a mitigation specialist. Today *Fennell* is incarcerated as the result of criminal behavior he committed while as a Georgetown police officer that involved kidnapping and sexual misconduct. He plead guilty to the charges and was sentenced to 10 years. Some of *Fennell* romantic "ex-mates" have revealed abuse psychological and emotional, by *Fennell*.

To execute someone where innocence clearly establishes itself and shows probability of innocence is criminal and unethical behavior. Our courts all across this country have gotten it wrong! They have sentenced men and women to prisons all across this country while evidence surfaced decades after the fact that they were indeed innocent. 14 hundred people have been exonerated since 1977 and declared innocent. In December, we saw the 150th exoneration (since 1977) of someone that was on death row. That means for every nine executions, one person was found innocent. What if the Postal Service lost one letter for every nine it delivered? What if an airline crashed one of every 10 flights? Innocence has raised questions for many of us. There have been 325 post-conviction DNA exonerations in the U.S.

For the State of Texas to execute Mr. Reed amounts to the State executing an innocent man. This is a State that must not be ignorant toward reality, that innocence must matter. It did not matter for Anthony Graves, it did not matter for Michael Anthony Green nor the 39 men and women that were exonerated from Texas prisons just last year. These are all *human beings that were placed inside a prison while innocent*. Time and time again all across this country including Texas, police, prosecutors, and judges have all contributed toward innocent people being sent to prison. All because they did not want to acknowledge the reality that innocence must matter as equal to guilt. Regardless if we want to admit the reality or not our criminal justice system does have major flaws that warrant reforms. Texas has executed people based off of probability rather than substantial guilt and this is one of many reasons why I oppose the death penalty for all men and women that are on death row across this country.

Governor Abbott, on this day I am requesting that you have a heart and stop the execution of Mr. Rodney Reed. Why? Innocence must matter. We cannot be a country that executes people based off of sloppy and unethical police work. It is only common sense that Reed's DNA would be found in Stites because they had a sexual relationship. People throughout the town of Bastrop confirm the relationship between Reed and Stites. The evidence revealing Reed's relationship with Stites has been distorted by courts and ignored as I strongly believe all in attempt to shield former Giddings police officer Fennell from prosecution.

I am requesting that you commute the sentence of Mr. Rodney Reed to any other sentence then death. I believe when doubts remain to surface relevant to someone's guilt, it is fair to impose an alternative sentence to prevent an innocent person from being executed. Governor Abbott, in the State of Illinois most of the men that have been exonerated as the result of Burge tortures spent two or more decades behind prison walls before they were able to secure their release based off of actual innocence and plea settlements. I am requesting that you allow the world to see that Texas has changed with your new administration. I am asking that you have a heart this day and to do what is right and moral by sparing the life of Reed.

Thank you in advance for granting my request.

Sincerely:

Mark A. Clements,  
National Board Member  
Campaign to End the Death Penalty