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Indio Police Command Unit

Hemet Police Officers' Association

Hemet Police Management Association

Fraternal Order of Police Riverside Lodge #8

Desert Hot Springs Police Officers' Association

Corona Police Officers' Association

Cathedral City Police Officers' Association

Cathedral City Police Management Association

Blythe Police Officers' Association

Beaumont Police Officers' Association

Banning Police Officers' Association

Issued jointly by the organizations listed above.

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 5, 2026

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Riverside County Police and Deputy Unions: Newsom Spares Murderers of Four Local Police Officers in Mass Commutation

Outgoing Governor overturns 87 Riverside County death sentences, including one handed down eleven weeks ago

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — The unions representing police officers and sheriff's deputies across Riverside County today condemned Governor Gavin Newsom's decision to wipe out every death sentence in California, calling it an abuse of the clemency power by a governor with weeks left in office.

The Governor's order covers 548 condemned murderers statewide, 87 of them sentenced by Riverside County juries.

Those spared include the men who murdered four police officers from Riverside and Palm Springs:

On January 13, 2001, Steve Woodruff ambushed Riverside Police Detective Charles "Doug" Jacobs III, 30, and Officer Ben Baker as they answered a noise complaint on Lemon Street, murdering Jacobs and trying to murder Baker. Jacobs had served the Riverside Police Department for five years and left behind his wife, a 6-month-old daughter and a 10-year-old stepson. Woodruff was first sentenced to death in 2003; after the Supreme Court ordered a new penalty trial, a second Riverside County jury sentenced him to death again on November 5, 2021, five years ago today.

On November 7, 2010, Riverside Police Officer Ryan Bonaminio, 27, an Army veteran of the Iraq War, stopped a suspected hit-and-run driver, Earl Ellis Green, a parolee with a record of violence that included assaulting a Banning police officer. Green ran, and Bonaminio chased him on foot near Fairmount Park. When Bonaminio slipped, Green beat him with a steel bar, took his gun, and shot him at point-blank range as he pleaded for his life. A Riverside County jury sentenced Green to death in 2012.

On October 8, 2016, Palm Springs Police Officers Jose Gilbert "Gil" Vega and Lesley Zerebny went to the home of John Hernandez Felix, answering a call for help from his own family. While they spoke with him through a screen door, he opened fire without warning with an AR-15 rifle. He wore body armor and carried armor-piercing ammunition. The District Attorney said he wanted to kill police officers.

Officer Vega, 63, gave 35 years to the people of Palm Springs and was preparing to retire. Officer Zerebny, 27, had been with the department about 18 months and had just returned from maternity leave. She left behind her husband, a sheriff's deputy, and their 4-month-old daughter. In 2019 a Riverside County jury convicted Felix of murdering both officers and sentenced him to death. Today the Governor erased that sentence.

The Governor did not find that any of the 87 Riverside County defendants was wrongly convicted. He commuted every sentence at once, without distinguishing between cases.

The President of the Riverside Sheriffs' Association along with those of every law enforcement association in the county have signed a joint letter to the Governor and the California Supreme Court demanding that the Governor withdraw the action and asking the Court to refuse to approve it.

"Riverside County jurors sat through these trials, weighed the evidence, and made the decision the law asked them to make. Gavin Newsom overruled every one of them with a signature on his way out the door," said William Hutchinson, Executive Director of the Riverside Sheriffs' Association, who served 28 years with the Palm Springs Police Department. "Gil Vega and Lesley Zerebny were my colleagues. Their families deserve better, and so does every officer working the street tonight. He told voters he would respect their decision. He waited until no voter could hold him to it, then broke his word."

"Our deputies put these killers in front of a jury, and the jury did its job. The Governor undid it without looking at a single case," said Jose Santos, President of the Riverside Sheriffs' Association.

"Gil Vega and Lesley Zerebny went to that door to help a family, and they were murdered by a man who wanted to kill cops. A jury of our neighbors sentenced him to death. Today Gavin Newsom told Lesley's daughter and Gil's family that his conscience matters more than their justice. We will never forgive that," said Joseph Cook, President of the Palm Springs Police Officers' Association.

"Doug Jacobs and Ryan Bonaminio were murdered serving the people of Riverside. The Governor looked at those cases and decided their murderers should keep living. Our members will never accept that, and neither will the families," said Jason Alter, President of the Riverside Police Officers' Association.

The decision is not final for most of the Riverside County cases. Under the California Constitution, the Governor cannot grant clemency to anyone with more than one felony conviction without a recommendation from the California Supreme Court. That covers 58 of the Riverside County cases, including the Bonaminio, Vega and Zerebny murders. The associations are calling on the Justices to review each case on its own record and reject a blanket commutation. The Court has used that power before: in 2018 it refused to recommend clemency in cases sent to it by Governor Jerry Brown.

The Governor's letter calls the decision a matter of California's values and claims he respects the voters' decision to keep the death penalty. California voters rejected repeal in 2012 (Proposition 34) and 2016 (Proposition 62), and in 2016 passed Proposition 66 to speed up death penalty appeals. In 2018, Newsom's campaign told voters he would respect the will of the electorate on capital punishment. Two months after taking office, he halted all executions. Today, with weeks left in his term, he erased every death sentence in the state, in a letter that again claims to respect the “values” of the California voters he is overruling.

These associations stand with law enforcement throughout California and with crime victims and their families. They are demanding that the Governor explain how victims' rights under Marsy's Law were honored. Board of Parole Hearings regulations now allow people serving life without parole to be considered for commutation, meaning the sentences substituted today are not guaranteed to hold.

The full joint letter and list of signers is attached.

About the signing organizations: This statement is issued jointly by the labor associations representing the men and women who serve in Riverside County's law enforcement agencies: the Riverside Sheriffs' Association; Riverside County Law Enforcement Management Unit; Riverside Police Officers' Association; Riverside Police Administrators' Association; Fraternal Order of Police Riverside Lodge #8; Palm Springs Police Officers' Association; Palm Springs Police Management Association; Banning Police Officers' Association; Beaumont Police Officers' Association; Blythe Police Officers' Association; Cathedral City Police Officers' Association; Cathedral City Police Management Association; Corona Police Officers' Association; Desert Hot Springs Police Officers' Association; Hemet Police Officers' Association; Hemet Police Management Association; Indio Police Officers' Association; Indio Police Command Unit; Menifee Police Officers' Association; and Murrieta Police Officers' Association.

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Joint Letter to the Governor and the California Supreme Court

November 5, 2026

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Chief Justice and Associate Justices
Supreme Court of California
350 McAllister Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Commutation of All California Death Sentences

Dear Governor Newsom and Justices of the California Supreme Court:

Today you commuted the death sentences of 548 convicted murderers, 87 of them sentenced by juries in Riverside County. We, the presidents of the associations representing the police officers and sheriff's deputies of Riverside County, condemn this decision without reservation. It is an abuse of the clemency power, an insult to the victims and their families, and a betrayal of the voters you swore to serve.

Clemency exists to correct an injustice in an individual case. You did not find that a single one of these 87 Riverside County defendants was wrongly convicted. You set aside every sentence at once because you personally disagree with the law. Each of these verdicts was returned by Riverside County jurors after a full trial and a separate penalty phase, and imposed by a judge. The most recent was handed down on August 21, 2026, eleven weeks ago.

Among those you spared is Steve Woodruff. On the afternoon of January 13, 2001, Riverside Police Detective Charles "Doug" Jacobs III and Officer Ben Baker answered a noise complaint on Lemon Street. Woodruff ambushed them, murdering Detective Jacobs and trying to murder Officer Baker. Doug Jacobs was 30 and had served Riverside for five years. He left behind his wife, a 6-month-old daughter and a 10-year-old stepson. A Riverside County jury sentenced Woodruff to death in 2003. When the Supreme Court ordered a new penalty trial, a second Riverside County jury heard the case and sentenced him to death again, exactly five years ago today. You overruled both juries.

Among them is Earl Ellis Green, a parolee with a record of violence that included assaulting a Banning police officer. On November 7, 2010, Riverside Police Officer Ryan Bonaminio, a 27-year-old Army veteran of the Iraq War, stopped a suspected hit-and-run driver. Green ran, and Officer Bonaminio chased him on foot near Fairmount Park. When Ryan slipped, Green beat him with a steel bar, took his gun, and shot him at point-blank range while he pleaded for his life. A Riverside County jury sentenced Green to death in 2012.

Among them is John Hernandez Felix. On October 8, 2016, Palm Springs Police Officers Jose Gilbert "Gil" Vega and Lesley Zerebny answered a family disturbance call at his home. While they spoke with him through a screen door, he opened fire with an AR-15 rifle without warning. He was wearing body armor and carrying armor-piercing ammunition. The District Attorney said he wanted to kill police officers, and he did. Gil Vega was 63, a 35-year veteran preparing to retire. Lesley Zerebny was 27 and

had just returned from maternity leave. She left behind her husband, a sheriff's deputy, and their 4-month-old daughter. Gil and Lesley were not simply killed. They were murdered, deliberately, by a man who came to that door ready to murder police. A Riverside County jury sentenced him to death. Today you decided he deserves to live.

Your letter says you listened to victims' families. Ask the Jacobs, Bonaminio, Vega and Zerebny families whether they were heard.

You call this decision a matter of California's values. The people of California have told you their values three times. They rejected repeal of the death penalty in 2012 with Proposition 34. They rejected it again in 2016 with Proposition 62. In that same election they passed Proposition 66, directing the state to speed up death penalty appeals so these sentences would be carried out. That is what California wants. Your letter puts your values in place of theirs.

In 2018, when you were asking Californians for their votes, your campaign told them the voters had spoken on the death penalty and that you would respect the will of the electorate. Californians took you at your word. Two months after taking office, you halted every execution. Today you erased every death sentence. And in the same letter that announces it, you write that you respect the voters' decision. You cannot respect a decision while you tear it apart. You said one thing to win the office and did the opposite once you had it. You waited until your final weeks, when no voter can hold you accountable, to do by executive order what you could never win at the ballot box. That is not conscience. It is a broken promise, and the Californians who voted for you on your word deserve to hear you admit it.

You claim that treating cases differently would create "two classes of murder victims." You have it backwards. The voters wrote a law that reserves the death penalty for the worst murders, including the murder of a peace officer in the line of duty. By treating every case the same, you have told the families of murdered officers that their loss counts for no more than any other. That is not mercy. It is indifference presented as principle.

You say these offenders will die in prison. Victims' families have heard promises like that before. Board of Parole Hearings regulations now allow people serving life without parole to be considered for commutation, so the sentence you substituted today can be shortened again by a future governor. Under Marsy's Law, Article I, Section 28 of the California Constitution, victims and their families have the right to notice and to be heard. We stand with law enforcement throughout California and with crime victims and their families in demanding that you explain how 548 families were given either before you acted.

Your decision is not final. More than half of the people on your list have more than one felony conviction, including 58 from Riverside County and the murderers of Officers Bonaminio, Vega and Zerebny. Article V, Section 8 of the California Constitution bars a governor from granting them clemency without the recommendation of a majority of the California Supreme Court.

To the Chief Justice and Associate Justices: the Constitution gave this Court that role so that no governor could act alone in these cases. This Court has refused to recommend clemency before, in 2018, when it blocked requests from Governor Jerry Brown. A blanket request covering hundreds of murderers, made without distinguishing a single case, is exactly what that check exists for. We respectfully ask the Court to review each of these cases on its own record, to hear from the victims' families, and to refuse to recommend a blanket commutation.

We demand that you withdraw this action. If you will not, meet face to face with the families of the Riverside County victims and explain to them why the sentences their juries imposed did not matter to you. The people of this county, and the officers who protect them, will not forget this decision.

Respectfully,



Jose Santos
President, Riverside Sheriffs' Association



William Edwards
President, Riverside County Law Enforcement Management Unit



Jason Alter
President, Riverside Police Officers' Association



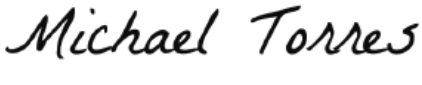
Eric Detmer
President, Riverside Police Administrators' Association



Juan Munoz
President, Fraternal Order of Police Riverside Lodge #8



Joseph Cook
President, Palm Springs Police Officers' Association



Michael Torres
President, Palm Springs Police Management Association



Eric Campa
President, Banning Police Officers' Association



Chris Crews
President, Beaumont Police Officers' Association



Wayne Mogg
President, Blythe Police Officers' Association



Jesse Borrego
President, Cathedral City Police Officers' Association



John Enos
President, Cathedral City Police Management Association

Ryan Hubbard

Ryan Hubbard
President, Corona Police Officers' Association

/s/ Greg Elias

Greg Elias
President, Desert Hot Springs Police Officers' Association

/s/ Peter Aguila

Peter Aguila
President, Hemet Police Officers' Association

Josiah Dougles
President, Hemet Police Management Association

Christopher Shannon

Viktor Custic
President, Indio Police Officers' Association

Christopher Shannon
President, Indio Police Command Unit

Evan Power

Onyemauche Garcia
President, Menifee Police Officers' Association

Evan Power
President, Murrieta Police Officers' Association

Association Quotes

Riverside Sheriffs' Association

Jose Santos, President

> "Our deputies put these killers in front of a jury, and the jury did its job. The Governor undid it without looking at a single case."

Riverside County Law Enforcement Management Unit

William Edwards, President

> "We are the ones who knock on the door when an officer is murdered. We know what these families were promised. Today the Governor took it back."

Riverside Police Officers' Association

Jason Alter, President

> "Doug Jacobs and Ryan Bonaminio were murdered serving the people of Riverside. The Governor looked at those cases and decided their murderers should keep living. Our members will never accept that, and neither will the families."

Riverside Police Administrators' Association

Eric Detmer, President

> "Every one of these sentences went through a trial, a penalty phase and years of appeals. The Governor threw out that entire process in one afternoon."

Fraternal Order of Police Riverside Lodge #8

Juan Munoz, President

> "The families of Doug Jacobs and Ryan Bonaminio sat through every day of those trials and kept their faith in the system. The Governor broke that faith with one signature."

Palm Springs Police Officers' Association

Joseph Cook, President

> "Gil Vega and Lesley Zerebny went to that door to help a family, and they were murdered by a man who wanted to kill cops. A jury of our neighbors sentenced him to death. Today Gavin Newsom told Lesley's daughter and Gil's family that his conscience matters more than their justice. We will never forgive that."

Palm Springs Police Management Association

Michael Torres, President

> "We led this department through the worst day in its history, then watched the courts do their work for three years. Today the Governor erased it."

Banning Police Officers' Association

Eric Campa, President

> "Clemency is supposed to fix a mistake. There was no mistake in these cases. This is the Governor putting his politics ahead of murdered Californians."

Beaumont Police Officers' Association

Chris Crews, President

"Our officers go to work knowing the risks. They should be able to count on the state to back them when the worst happens. Today it didn't."

Blythe Police Officers' Association

Wayne Mogg, President

"Blythe sits at the far edge of this county, but our officers answer the same calls and take the same risks as every officer in Riverside County. When one of us is murdered, all of us feel it. Today the Governor turned his back on all of us."

Cathedral City Police Officers' Association

Jesse Borrego, President

"Gil Vega and Lesley Zerebny were murdered just down the road from us. Every officer in the Coachella Valley carried that loss. The Governor has reopened it."

Cathedral City Police Management Association

John Enos, President

"We have stood at the funerals of officers murdered in this valley. The Governor was not there. The juries were, and he overruled every one of them."

Corona Police Officers' Association

Ryan Hubbard, President

"Voters upheld the death penalty in 2012 and again in 2016. The Governor couldn't win that argument at the ballot box, so he went around the voters."

Desert Hot Springs Police Officers' Association

Greg Elias, President

"Victims' families waited years, some of them decades, for these cases to end. The Governor ended them on his terms, not theirs."

Hemet Police Officers' Association

Peter Aguila, President

"If murdering a police officer doesn't earn the most serious sentence California has, nothing does. That's the message the Governor sent today."

Hemet Police Management Association

Josiah Dougles, President

"A jury listened to the evidence and decided what justice required. The Governor never set foot in that courtroom, and he had no right to undo what they decided."

Indio Police Officers' Association

Viktor Custic, President

"Coachella Valley jurors took their oath seriously. The Governor should have taken his just as seriously."

Indio Police Command Unit
Christopher Shannon, President

"Every shift, we send officers toward danger. We owe them a state that stands behind them when the worst happens. Today the Governor walked away from them."

Menifee Police Officers' Association
Onyemauche Garcia, President

"Eighty-seven Riverside County juries reached a verdict. One man in Sacramento overruled all of them."

Murrieta Police Officers' Association
Evan Power, President

"This was a decision for jurors, judges and voters. All three made it. The Governor ignored every one of them."