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# Proposed Mass Commutation of Death Sentences

**By California District Attorneys Association** November 12, 2026

Sacramento — The California District Attorneys Association (CDAA) today strongly condemned Governor Gavin Newsom's decision to commute all 548 death sentences in California, calling the unprecedented action a profound disregard for the decisions of juries and judges, the rights of crime victims and the repeatedly expressed will of California voters.

The Governor’s sweeping action replaces hundreds of individual sentencing decisions, each reached after extensive legal proceedings, careful consideration of evidence and years of judicial review, with a single executive decision that makes no distinction among the crimes committed, the circumstances of the offenders or the victims whose lives were taken.

“With the stroke of a pen, Governor Newsom has disregarded the decisions of hundreds of jurors and judges, and the anguish of families who lost loved ones to the worst crimes imaginable,” said Jeannine M. Pacioni, President of CDAA and Monterey County District Attorney. “These sentences were not handed down lightly. Ordinary Californians sat through weeks of harrowing testimony, weighed the evidence and carried the enormous responsibility of deciding an appropriate punishment. Today, the Governor has substituted his personal beliefs for all of those judgments. The victims were never given a commutation. Their families were never given a choice. They deserve far better than this.”

CDAA noted that the Governor acted without providing prosecutors or victims’ families meaningful advance notice or an opportunity to be heard.

“The Governor acknowledges in his own letter that this decision will reopen painful wounds for victims’ families. Yet he made this sweeping decision without giving those families or the prosecutors who represented them an opportunity to weigh in,” said Greg Totten, Chief Executive Officer of CDAA. “These families have endured unimaginable loss, participated in years of court proceedings and placed their faith in our justice system. They deserved more than learning through a public announcement that the sentences imposed on their loved ones' killers were being overturned.”

In his letter announcing the commutations, Governor Newsom expressly acknowledged that decisions to seek, impose and uphold death sentences belong to prosecutors, juries and courts. Yet his action effectively sets aside every one of those individualized determinations.

CDAA emphasized that executive clemency serves an important purpose when extraordinary circumstances in an individual case warrant reconsideration. But there is a fundamental difference between reviewing a particular case on its merits and granting mass clemency.

“Clemency is an extraordinary power intended to provide relief when the facts and circumstances of an individual case justify it,” Totten said. “It was never intended to serve as a substitute for the legislative process or to allow one elected official to effectively nullify hundreds of jury verdicts simply because he disagrees with the law. The Governor has turned an extraordinary constitutional safeguard into a sweeping instrument of personal policy.”

The Governor's action also stands in stark contrast to the expressed will of California voters. In 2012, voters rejected Proposition 34, which would have repealed the death penalty. In 2016, voters again rejected repeal through Proposition 62 while approving Proposition 66, intended to expedite the implementation of death sentences.

“Californians have repeatedly voted to retain the death penalty for the state's most heinous crimes,” Pacioni said. “The Governor is entitled to his personal opposition to capital punishment. But those beliefs do not diminish the decisions of California voters, the responsibilities of our courts or the rights of victims and their families to be heard.”

“Reasonable people can disagree about the death penalty,” Totten concluded. “But there should be no disagreement that victims deserve respect, juries deserve to have their decisions taken seriously, and extraordinary executive powers should be exercised with restraint and careful consideration. Governor Newsom’s decision fails those fundamental tests.”