

For Immediate Release

November 25, 2020

Contact: Allison Cohen

allison@deathpenaltyaction.org

513-787-9399

Execution by Firing Squad “Just Ridiculous.”

Terre Haute, IN — News broke today that the Trump Administration has recently proposed a [new federal regulation](#) to authorize federal executions by firing squad. Randy Gardner, the brother of Ronnie Lee Gardner, the last prisoner executed by firing squad in the United States (Utah, 2010) offered the following statement:

“That’s just ridiculous,” said Gardner. “It’s just torture what this does to a body. I’ve got pictures of what it did to my brothers’ body. It was just one more painful piece of the puzzle for our family. Perhaps they don’t care about the family of the executed, but I am certain this is also more traumatic for the prison workers who have to carry out the execution, and the workers who get to clean it up. I can tell you for sure, it still affects me and our family.”

The proposal comes as the lame duck administration plans to squeeze in at least five more executions before leadership transitions to the Biden administration, which has pledged to abolish the federal death penalty.

A close read of [the proposal](#) reveals that it is not specifically about execution by firing squad; although it could happen if this regulation is passed. This proposal is an obvious attempt to circumvent rulings against lethal injection, the difficulty of legally securing drugs for lethal injections, as well as any rulings about having to perform federal executions in the manner of the state in which the crime was committed. The latter issue was part of litigation that delayed executions originally scheduled for December 2019. The proposal would also allow federal executions to be carried out in state facilities if the federal penitentiary at Terre Haute cannot perform an execution in a manner other than lethal injection.

“It really doesn’t matter how we kill our prisoners,” said Abraham Bonowitz, Director of [Death Penalty Action](#), the organization that has been leading public opposition to the execution spree started by the Trump Administration in July. “The real torture of the death penalty is the wait. Why are we debating how we kill our prisoners? We should be talking about the fact that we allow the government to carry out executions in a legal system that is so broken, racist and unfair.”

The Trump Administration currently has five more executions scheduled, starting on International Human Rights Day (Dec. 10) and ending on Martin Luther King’s birthday (Jan 15). And who are they killing? Four Black men and a woman who is undeniably severely mentally ill. All of this is completely unnecessary.

“We can be safe from dangerous individuals and hold them accountable to their actions without executions, said Bonowitz. “That’s what we do the vast majority of the time.”

Orlando Hall's execution on November 19th was the most recent execution in the unprecedented killing spree. Hall was the first person executed under a lame duck president since 1889, when Grover Cleveland was ending his first term 131 years ago. Until July 14, 2020, no federal executions had taken place since 2003. There have now been eight executions within 18 weeks, a number equal to all of the executions carried out in the entire eight year term of President Eisenhower.

"President Trump is already the most-executing president since the 1950s, so he's got his record as the biggest and the best. Perhaps President Trump is now gunning to beat President Roosevelt, who oversaw 17 federal executions, and those were during the second World War," said Bonowitz. "Seriously, no further executions are necessary. We call upon President Trump and Attorney General Barr to stop them all. Just stop."

Bonowitz and Gardner are available for further comment. They are in possession of photographs of the damage done to the body of Ronnie Lee Gardner when he was executed by firing squad in Utah in 2010.

Death Penalty Action is urging US residents to [write to their members of congress](#) to demand that abolishing the federal death penalty be made a priority issue in the next congress.

###

Photograph: Randy Gardner speaking at a recent execution protest in Terre Haute, Indiana. This photograph may be used with attribution to Death Penalty Action.



