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PRESS RELEASE

CONVICTED MURDERER LAFAYETTE COLLINS GRANTED PAROLE

Napa County District Attorney Allison Haley announced that Lafayette Collins, age 66, was granted parole after a January 9, 2018 hearing before the Board of Parole Hearings at California State Prison in Vacaville. It was his twelfth parole hearing.

Collins was convicted by a Napa jury of the 1975 murder of George Casten, age 63, in American Canyon. The victim's wife discovered him dead on the living room floor when she came home from work. He had been tied up with an electric cord and beaten. His leg was burned with a cigarette. He died of heart failure secondary to trauma. The house was ransacked and a number of items were stolen. Nine years later, in 1984, Collins was identified by his fingerprints which had been lifted from a coffee can in which the victim kept his change. Although Collins denied ever having been to American Canyon, a jury convicted him of first degree murder. He was sentenced to seven years to life. He first became eligible for parole in 1991.

Deputy District Attorney Holly Quate appeared at the hearing with the victim's youngest brother, age 94, and the victim's nephew. She argued against the release, citing the cruelty and callousness of the murder, and the fact that Collins continued to minimize his responsibility. She pointed out that Collins continued to deny any knowledge of how the victim obtained his injuries. This, she urged, shows his lack of insight into his behavior and the factors that caused him to commit the violent robbery which resulted in Mr. Casten's death. For these reasons, she argued that Collins continues to represent an unreasonable risk of danger to the community should he be released.

The victim's brother noted that he was one of fourteen children. He spoke of the victim's kind nature and upstanding character. He emphasized the permanence of the family's loss and the devastation the murder caused and continues to cause for him and his entire extended family. The victim's nephew told the hearing officers that the murder didn't just affect his family, but it traumatized the entire close-knit community of American Canyon. He also emphasized the heartless nature of the crime and the utterly unnecessary violence inflicted on the victim.

Nevertheless, the Parole Board found Collins suitable for parole. Since he was 23 years old at the time of the offense, he qualified as a youthful offender. The Board, therefore, gave great weight to the qualities and hallmarks of youth and to the diminished culpability of young offenders. Somewhat paradoxically, at age 66 and past the age of recidivism, Collins is also eligible for elder parole. The

Board noted his long record of being discipline free and substance free while in prison. It felt that he demonstrated adequate insight into the killing. Collins plans to Parole to Hayward. The decision will be reviewed by the Board of Parole Hearings and can be reviewed by the Governor.

Beginning in 2009, a Three-Judge Panel on prison overcrowding ordered California to reduce its prison population. The decision was upheld by the United States Supreme Court. As a result, a variety of programs were instituted to reduce prison populations, including Medical Parole, Compassionate Relief, and Elder Parole. Inmates who are at least 60 years old and have served 25 years of their sentence can receive an “elderly parole hearing” where special consideration is given to the inmate’s advanced age, long-term confinement, and diminished physical condition. Inmates are eligible even on serious, violent sex crimes and murders. This is of great concern to victims in these cases.

In addition, California’s “youthful parole” program required that inmates who were under age 23 when they committed their crimes be considered for parole after serving between 15 and 25 years, depending on the original sentence. On January 1, 2018, this program was expanded to include inmates who were under age 25 at the time of the offense.

The Napa County District Attorney’s Office sends a representative to every parole hearing for an inmate serving a life sentence for a Napa crime.

Any questions regarding this case may be directed to Deputy District Attorney Holly Quate.