

330 West Broadway  
San Diego, CA 92101  
(619) 531-4040  
SanDiegoDA.com



DWAIN D. WOODLEY  
ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

May 3, 2022  
For Immediate Release

Contact: [Steve Walker](tel:6195313890) (619) 531-3890  
[Tanya Sierra](tel:6195313315) (619) 531-3315  
*En Español* [Barbara Medina](tel:6195313305) (619) 531-3305

# Judge Grants Petition That Will Release SDPD Cop Killer from Prison

## *DA Urging Governor Newsom to Appeal Court's Decision*

A San Diego Superior Court judge has granted a petition that will release cop killer, Jesus Cecena, 61, from state prison, despite Gov. Gavin Newsom reversing the killer's parole in 2020. Cecena shot and killed a San Diego police officer in 1978 and has been serving a life sentence since 1979. Although he has been granted parole five times since 2014, each time his parole has been reversed by California's Governor over concerns that Cecena remains unsuitable for release because he lacks insight and has not accepted responsibility that his murder was gang-motivated and done to advance his status with the gang.

In the latest grant of release from prison, the court agreed with Cecena's challenge to the Governor's 2020 parole reversal, substituting the court's own judgment about Cecena's current dangerousness and rejecting the Governor's determination that Cecena poses a continuing unreasonable risk if released, and will allow Cecena to be released from custody sometime in the next month.

"While we understand the factors considered by the Court, we respectfully disagree with the court's decision to release this murderer of a police officer back into the community particularly because his persistent lack of insight and remorse into this atrocious crime makes him unpredictable and dangerous," DA Stephan said. "Cecena has refused to acknowledge both his true motivation for this horrific murder and the enhanced status he sought in his gang by committing this crime. The Superior Court decision did not give weight to these important factors and consequently reached an erroneous conclusion. I am urging Governor Newsom to authorize the Attorney General to appeal the court's decision based on the serious concerns about Cecena's suitability that the Governor relied on in reversing the grant of parole in his October 2020 letter."

San Diego Police Officer Archie Buggs, 30, was shot four times after he stopped a car driven by Cecena, who was a 17-year-old gang member in the Skyline neighborhood in 1978. Cecena fired five times at Buggs, then paused, walked toward the fallen officer, and fired a final bullet into his head at point-blank range. The officer died on the street, his hand still on his service revolver.

Cecena was convicted of murder and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole on August 22, 1979. Because Cecena was 17 at the time he killed Officer Buggs, his sentence was

reduced to a term of seven years-to-life in March of 1982. In arguing against Cecena’s release from custody, the DA cited Cecena’s unstable social history continued during his incarceration; he received more than 10 violation reports for misconduct while in prison.

“Cecena has a long history of minimizing, denying, displacing blame and contradicting himself in an effort to avoid accepting responsibility for his execution style conduct,” DA Stephan said. “Without accepting full responsibility for the true nature of this crime, he continues to present a clear and unacceptable danger to our community. It is important to pause on the gravity of this case that fortunately remains a rare occurrence where a police officer on duty, in uniform, and with a marked patrol car is shot and executed while he is on the ground. The cold-blooded murder of San Diego Police Officer Archie Buggs devastated his family, his department, and our community. The very nature of the crime was not only callous, but inexplicably senseless, and it demonstrated a total disregard for human life and disdain for those in a position of authority.”

Cecena has been granted parole five times, in 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2020. Each time the Governor has reversed the grant of parole after the DA filed objections, finding that Cecena is not yet suitable and safe for release into society. This time, Cecena filed a writ of *habeas corpus*, challenging the Governor’s parole reversal and on April 22, San Diego Superior Court Judge David Gill granted the writ, clearing the way for Cecena’s release from prison. Cecena’s parole continues to be opposed by San Diego Police Chief David Nisleit and the San Diego Police Officers Association.

###

**About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office**

*The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.*

