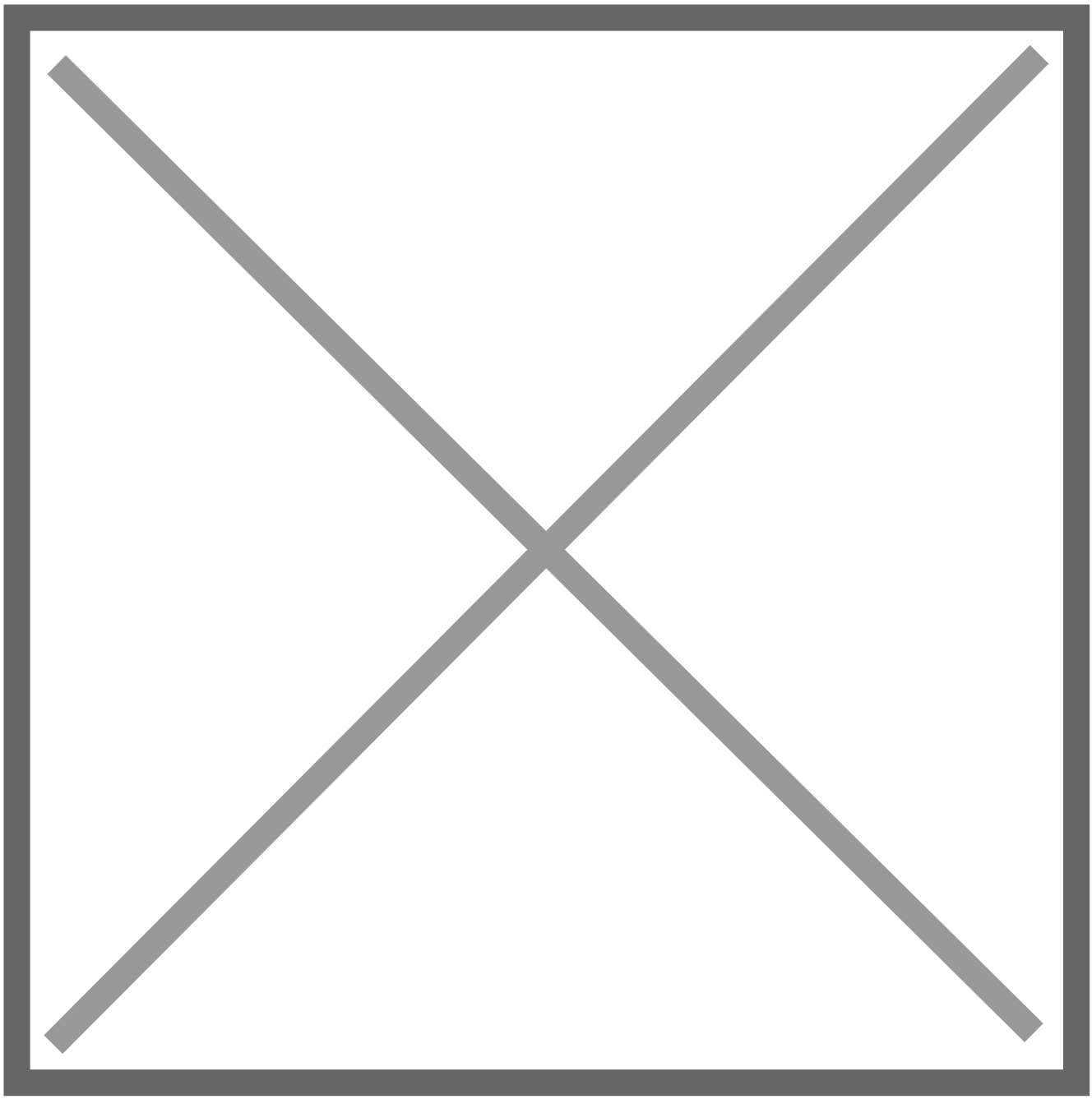
News



The Federal Corrections Complex in Terre Haute, Ind., is seen May 22, 2019. Orlando Hall, 49, was executed at the facility shortly before midnight Nov. 19. A day earlier a federal appeals court refused to delay the execution of Hall, one of five men convicted in 1994 of kidnapping and raping a teenager before burying her alive. (CNS photo/Reuters/Bryan Woolston)



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The Supreme Court Nov. 19 denied a stay of execution for federal inmate Orlando Hall, who was put to death by lethal injection an hour later, just before midnight.

His execution had been delayed for several hours by last-minute filings, but the Supreme Court's order lifted a district judge's injunction that had temporarily halted the execution. Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan dissented.

The court also rejected, with no noted dissents, three separate emergency requests filed days prior to Hall's execution, seeking a postponement.

Hall, 49, was the eighth federal inmate executed since the Trump administration resumed federal executions this past summer. He was convicted of kidnapping and killing a Texas teenager in 1994.

Last minute appeals for Hall stressed that bias played a role in his death sentence. Hall is Black, and his sentence was recommended by an all-white jury. His lawyers also said that COVID-19 restrictions limited their ability to help him.

"We pray for all who loved Orlando. May they be comforted by God in their time of grief. Our call to end the death penalty continues," tweeted Catholic Mobilizing Network, shortly after Hall's death was announced.

Sr. Helen Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille and longtime anti-death penalty activist, tweeted Nov. 20 that under Attorney General William Barr's leadership, "the Justice Department worked into the early morning hours filing reams of appeals, ultimately succeeding in gaining court approval to execute a Black man who was sentenced to death by an all-white jury. This is not 'Christlike behavior.'"

The Supreme Court's action in Hall's case was the first death penalty decision for Justice Amy Coney Barrett. In 1998, she co-wrote an article saying Catholic judges shouldn't have to recuse themselves in death penalty cases because of the church's opposition to capital punishment.

Donna Keogh, from St. Bartholomew Parish in Columbus, Indiana, has corresponded with Hall for the past 16 years, after meeting him through a parish program providing Christmas presents to inmates' children. She told CBS News that she doesn't understand what executing Hall accomplishes.

"My faith tells me that all life is precious and that includes the lives on death row," she said. "I just don't see any purpose.

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She also told a reporter that Hall, who has two sons and 13 grandchildren, was remorseful for his crimes and had turned his life around in prison, educating himself and becoming an avid reader. She added that he was leaning on his Muslim faith.

On Nov. 18, referring to Hall's pending execution and two other federal executions slated for December, two U.S. bishops' committee chairmen called on the government to end this practice.

"We ask President (Donald) Trump and Attorney General (William) Barr, as an act of witness to the dignity of all human life: stop these executions," said the statement from Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

Earlier in the day of Hall's execution, U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan said it had to be temporarily halted while the court examined the issues raised by Hall's attorneys.

"The court is deeply concerned that the government intends to proceed with a method of execution that this court and the Court of Appeals have found violates federal law," she wrote.

Hall and Brandon Bernard, scheduled to be executed Dec. 10, had joined a group of 13 inmates appealing that the drug used by the federal government in executions causes "excruciating pain and suffering before dying" when not paired with a separate pain-relieving drug.

Their attorneys told the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit that this execution method was in violation of the Eighth Amendment prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.

Although the three-judge panel allowed the executions to go forward, it said the lower court was wrong to throw out the inmates' challenge to the execution drug used by the federal government and would allow litigation against this method to continue.

In a separate ruling Nov. 19, a federal judge postponed the execution of federal death-row inmate Lisa Montgomery until at least Dec. 31, up from the initial date of Dec. 8. Montgomery, who would be the first woman executed by the federal government in more than six decades, sought the postponement because her attorney had contracted the coronavirus after visiting her in prison.

The Death Penalty Information Center said this is the first time since 1889 that the federal government has carried out an execution in the time between a presidential election and the inauguration of a new president.

President-elect Joe Biden has said he will end federal executions and plans to incentivize states to stop executions.