



## Office of the Texas Governor | Greg Abbott

[Home](#) [Governor Abbott](#) [First Lady](#) [Initiatives](#) [News](#) [Organization](#)

[Home](#) [News](#) [Governor Abbott Commutes Death Sentence Of Thomas Bartlett Whitaker](#)

# Governor Abbott Commutes Death Sentence Of Thomas Bartlett Whitaker

February 22, 2018 | Austin, Texas | [Press Release](#)

Governor Greg Abbott today issued a proclamation commuting the death sentence of Thomas Bartlett Whitaker following a unanimous decision by the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. Thomas Bartlett Whitaker will now serve life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Governor Abbott released the following statement:

“As a former trial court judge, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Attorney General involved in prosecuting some of the most notorious criminals in Texas, I have the utmost regard for the role that juries and judges play in our legal system. The role of the Governor is not to second-guess the court process or re-evaluate the law and evidence. Instead, the Governor’s role under the Constitution is distinct from the judicial function. The Governor’s role is to consider recommendations by the

Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, and view matters through a lens broader than the facts and law applied to a single case. That is particularly important in death penalty cases.

“In just over three years as Governor, I have allowed 30 executions. I have not granted a commutation of a death sentence until now, for reasons I here explain.

“The murders of Mr. Whitaker’s mother and brother are reprehensible. The crime deserves severe punishment for the criminals who killed them. The recommendation of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, and my action on it, ensures Mr. Whitaker will never be released from prison.

“The decision of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles is supported by the totality of circumstances in this case. The person who fired the gun that killed the victims did not receive the death penalty, but Mr. Whitaker, who did not fire the gun, did get the death penalty. That factor alone may not warrant commutation for someone like Mr. Whitaker who recruited others to commit murder. Additional factors make the decision more complex.

“Mr. Whitaker’s father, who survived the attempt on his life, passionately opposes the execution of his son. Mr. Whitaker’s father insists that he would be victimized again if the state put to death his last remaining immediate family member. Also, Mr. Whitaker voluntarily and forever waived any and all claims to parole in exchange for a commutation of his sentence from death to life without the possibility of parole. Moreover, the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles unanimously voted for commutation. The totality of these factors warrants a commutation of Mr. Whitaker’s death sentence to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Mr. Whitaker must spend the remainder of his life behind bars as punishment for this heinous crime.”

[Read Governor Abbott's proclamation.](#)

## Office of the Governor

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