



OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
TODD SPITZER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

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Kimberly Edds
Director of Public Affairs
Office: 714-347-8405, Cell: 714-504-1917
media@ocdapa.org

**Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer Issues Statement on Twelve
Mentally Ill Offenders, including Murder Defendant, to Be Released Back into
Our Communities Unsupervised in Next Two Months
If County of Orange Fails to Find Treatment Beds
Two serious offenders could be released back into Orange County as early as
Friday.**

SANTA ANA – Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer issued the following statement:

Twelve criminal defendants, including a defendant charged with hacking a stranger to death with a hatchet and a man arrested trying to break into his neighbor's house to rape her, who have been determined to be so mentally ill they could not be restored to competency after two years of treatment in a state mental hospital will be released back to Orange County neighborhoods in the next two months if the County of Orange is unable to find them treatment beds in a licensed, locked down facility.

When a defendant is so mentally ill that they are not restored to competency during their two-year treatment period at the Department of State Hospitals, criminal proceedings which are overseen by the District Attorney come to an end, and as a result the District Attorney has no further say in protecting the public in these cases. Once the criminal proceedings are ended, the only other option is either a Murphy conservatorship with the County's Public Guardian – which must be in a locked down, state licensed facility, or release back into our communities with well-documented mental illness, and no treatment or oversight.

This is unacceptable.

Mental health options being increasingly introduced and promoted by liberals in the state Legislature and Governor Gavin Newsom over the last several years have resulted in just another smoke and mirrors tactic to facilitate the early release of dangerous and violent criminals back into our neighborhoods. Simultaneously, they have failed miserably to provide the mental health beds necessary to treat these individuals – and in turn created the most dangerous get out of jail free card yet.

If there is no treatment because there are no beds, these mentally ill and dangerous offenders are released back into society without consequence to the lawmakers, while local governments are forced to shoulder the burden and California communities are forced to suffer a serious threat to their public safety.

This is unfair, and more importantly, it is dangerous.

The government's core function is to protect its citizens, but instead, Governor Newsom and the state Legislature are more worried about Washington, D.C. politics than protecting public safety.

The County of Orange – due to an apparent lack of planning and despite months of warnings has up to this point failed to find treatment beds which meet the required guidelines for placement in advance of a looming deadline. Instead, the residents of Orange County are facing the very real possibility that the first two serious offenders will be released back into our communities on Friday, November 7, 2025:

That includes:

- Manvir Sandher who brutally beat his 65-year-old neighbor after being told to drive more slowly in their Fountain Valley cul-de-sac in June 2023. He was committed to a state hospital in September 2023 after a judge found him incompetent to stand trial. He is statutorily required to be released back into the community on Friday, November 7, 2025 unless the County can find him a suitable placement.

- Derrick Riehl who spent years stalking his Newport Beach neighbor in violation of a restraining order, threatening the young woman's life and breaking into her home. 60-year-old Riehl was arrested in January 2022 trying to climb over the woman's fence with two flashlights, a bottle of massage oil, and a vibrator. His zipper was down, and he was not wearing underwear when he was arrested. He was committed to a state hospital in August 2022 after a judge found him incompetent to stand trial. He is statutorily required to be released back into the community on Friday, November 7, 2025 unless the County can find him a suitable placement.

State law would force the release of ten other serious, mentally ill Orange County offenders by January 21, 2026, unless the County of Orange can find appropriate placements for these individuals. This includes Ivan Dimov, who was charged with first-degree murder and the personal use of a hatchet for hacking 53-year-old Kyle Boyd Avila to death as he sat in his Toyota scion near a Costa Mesa apartment complex in 2016. Witnesses watched in horror as he butchered Avila, a complete stranger. Dimov could be released on December 19, 2025, if County officials fail to find him an appropriate placement as required by law.

There is no disputing the fact that there are no beds for these individuals in the state's mental hospitals and as a result this is yet another unfunded mandate being offloaded to local government to solve the state's mental health crisis. But we knew this was coming.

I am mystified at why the County of Orange, with its hard-fought reputation of being California's safest large county, would be willing to put public safety at risk by failing to have a plan in place to avoid the release of these clearly dangerous individuals back into our communities without any oversight or medical treatment and well-documented mental health issues.

The Orange County District Attorney's Office knows only too well of the disconnect between the criminal proceedings and the conservatorship proceedings as evidence by the County Public Guardian's complete abandonment of her duties in the conservatorship matter of mass murder defendant, Aminadab Gaxiola Gonzalez, who killed four people at a business complex in Orange, including a 9-year-old boy.

On October 18, 2022, the Board of Supervisors voted to stand with the murder victims and the Orange Police Department by directing County Counsel to advocate for a public conservatorship hearing in this case. Unfortunately, County Counsel was unable to carry out this directive because its client, the Public Guardian, refused to take a position on the issue.

The unwillingness to brief its position to protect public safety and lack of even the most cursory attempt at advocacy on the Gaxiola case is emblematic of the Public Guardian's performance. Its failure to comply with the Court's directive is unacceptable and shined a spotlight on the need for change.

Despite a much-needed personnel change in the Public Guardian, the lack of advocacy for public safety by the department persists – to the detriment of the public we serve.

Regrettably while the District Attorney's Office has been forced by state law to sit on the sidelines when the criminal case comes to an end because an offender could not be restored to mental competency within the two years of treatment at a state mental hospital, it appears the Public Guardian is willing to put the safety of its residents at risk.

As the elected District Attorney of Orange County, I refuse to sit idly by and allow dangerous offenders we know suffer from serious mental illness to be let out the front door and into our neighborhoods unsupervised and untreated. This is a recipe for disaster.

I am calling on the Board of Supervisors to immediately convene a special hearing on this issue to ensure there are adequate mental health beds to avoid any statutory release of these mentally ill and violent offenders – and to ensure that the Public Guardian, which now is the only voice that can advocate for public safety in these conservatorship proceedings, be a vigorous advocate for public safety.

Time is not on our side, and with every second that ticks by is another second closer to our public safety being jeopardized.

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