

As inmate faces execution Wednesday, questions of guilt remain

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy | Sep. 19, 2011 NCR Today

My friend Art Laffin, a Catholic peace activist and member of Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation, is among the growing chorus of voices pleading for the life of Georgia death row inmate Troy Davis who is scheduled to be executed Wednesday.

Davis appears before Georgia's Board of Pardon and Parole today and Art is requesting that people call the Board and ask for clemency.

"We have to save Troy's life," Art wrote in an email circulated late last night.

Davis was convicted in the 1989 killing of a Savannah off-duty police officer Mark MacPhail, Sr., but has always maintained his innocence. The case against Davis has "fallen apart" [says Amnesty International](#) [1]. There is no physical evidence linking him to the crime. All but two of the state's non-police witnesses have recanted and many have stated in sworn affidavits they were pressured into testifying against him.

Davis' high-profile case has not only attracted the attention of anti-death penalty activists but those who believe there is too much doubt about his guilt to allow an execution to go forward.

Former FBI director William Sessions is among a number of prominent voices pleading for the life of the Georgia inmate. In a [Thursday op-ed for the Atlanta-Journal Constitution](#) [2], Sessions wrote that "serious questions about Davis' guilt, highlighted by witness recantations, allegations of police coercion and a lack of relevant physical evidence, continue to plague [Davis'] conviction."

Former president Jimmy Carter, Pope Benedict, Savannah's Catholic bishop emeritus J. Kevin Boland, and Atlanta archbishop Wilton Gregory have also advocated on Davis' behalf.

Last Thursday, advocates for the Georgia death row inmate handed over to the state's board of pardon and parole thousands of petitions with the names of more than 600,000 people who support Davis. Dozens of his supporters rallied and prayed outside the government building where today's parole hearing is being held.

Art would be with them, if he could. Tonight he speaks at an anti-death penalty event at St. John's University in Minnesota. He does so with his brother Paul in mind. Twelve years ago, Paul, a well-loved social worker in Connecticut, was fatally stabbed by a mentally ill man. The murder has not embittered Art but rather intensified his tireless efforts to abolish the death penalty.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/cases/usa-troy-davis>

[2] <http://m.ajc.com/opinion/should-davis-be-executed-1181530.html>