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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: September 23, 2011
Re: Kathleen O'Connell found
Suitable for Parole

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Kathleen O'Connell, age 43, formerly of Modesto, was found suitable for parole at a September 13, 2011 hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla. Assistant District Attorney Carol Shipley appeared at the hearing and argued for continued confinement based on the callousness of the crime and O'Connell's disciplinary record while incarcerated.

On February 4, 1993, while at her residence in Modesto, O'Connell attempted to commit suicide by disconnecting the gas line to her stove in the kitchen. She planned for the fumes to overcome her and her two children, ages two and three. The gasses, which accumulated in the house, were accidentally ignited by an unknown source. O'Connell and her children received serious burns. Both children sustained burns over 50% of their bodies, including their faces, and have undergone numerous surgeries throughout their lives. O'Connell was convicted on May 10, 1994 of two counts of attempted murder with the enhancement of personally causing great bodily injury, and two counts of abusing or endangering the health of a child.

Shipley noted that O'Connell had not demonstrated that she could abide by the rules in prison as she had 22 violations since she entered prison in 1995, with the last violation occurring in 2009. Shipley argued that, if she cannot abide by the rules for a substantial period of time while confined, she would not be able to follow the rules in a non-confined setting.

The two-commissioner board based their decision to grant O'Connell parole on the following reasons: she has no juvenile record; she showed remorse for the crime; she was motivated to commit the crime as the result of significant stress in her life; she had a lack of criminal history; her age reduces the probability of recidivism; she had realistic plans for release; and institutional activities indicate an enhanced ability to function within the law upon release. In calculating her release date, the Commissioners considered only the attempted murder of one child stating that they don't "pile" them on. The District Attorney's Office considers the attempt to kill each child as a separate and distinct crime. O'Connell had previously been denied parole in 2001 and in 2008.