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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: January 27, 2021
Re: Benjamin Frank Ballard
Child killer granted parole

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Benjamin Frank Ballard, age 61, of Modesto, was granted parole after a hearing by the Board of Parole Hearings held at the California Men's Colony on December 29, 2020. Deputy District Attorney Donya Nunes appeared at the hearing on behalf of the People.

On October 3, 1984, 3-year-old Melissa E. stopped breathing and was rushed to the hospital where she died. An autopsy determined her neck had been broken. Medical personnel also observed numerous bruises on the child's head, neck, face, back, shoulders and buttocks. The victim's mother told detectives that her daughter "fell" in the bathtub, but eventually she admitted that her boyfriend, Ballard, was to blame. Ballard admitted to investigators that he had been physically abusing the toddler almost every day. On the day she died, Ballard slapped the victim for wetting herself, physically shook her and picked her up by the neck, breaking it. Ballard blamed his actions on a heroin addiction. At the time, Ballard had been in contact with the victim for only one month.

In 1985, Ballard pled guilty to second degree murder and was sentenced to serve 15 years to life in state prison.

Since being in prison custody, Ballard has received a number of rules violations including one in 2016 for appropriating personal property. A prison psychologist who interviewed Ballard in 2018 gave the opinion that the inmate posed a moderate risk of violence to society if he were to be released on parole.

Ballard was a 25-year-old at the time he killed Melissa E. making him eligible for "Youthful Offender Parole" as well as "Elder Parole" due to his current age of 61. The Board gave great weight to these two factors and found that Ballard had achieved significant insight into why he committed the crime, showed appropriate remorse for his past acts and exhibited growth and maturity since his conviction. The Board was also particularly impressed by Ballard's programming, self-reflection, education and volunteer work in prison over the last 35 years. Lastly, the Board found that Ballard had adequate parole plans and had received recommendation letters from various organizations. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Board granted Ballard's release on parole.

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