



# Office of the District Attorney Stanislaus County

**Birgit Fladager**  
District Attorney

**Assistant District Attorney**  
Jeffrey M. Laugero

**Chief Deputies**  
Marlisa Ferreira  
Wendell Emerson  
Michael D. Houston  
Mark Zahner

**Bureau of Investigation**  
Chief Terry L. Seese

## PRESS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

Date: October 6, 2022  
Re: Josephine Origel  
Murder Inmate Denied Parole

### For More Information Contact:

John Goold, Public Information Liaison  
Phone: (209) 525-6909

**Modesto, California** - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Josephine Origel, age 67, formerly of Modesto was found unsuitable for parole during a September 23, 2022 hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings held at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla. Deputy District Attorney Margot L. Roen appeared at the hearing on behalf of the People to argue against Origel's release on parole.

On December 8, 2000, after an intense investigation into her whereabouts, deputies from the Stanislaus County Sheriff's department found 4-year-old Megan Mendez's tiny, lifeless body buried under a patio in Josephine Origel's backyard in Modesto. An autopsy revealed the child had suffered an ongoing pattern of physical abuse including evidence of healed fractures to her ribs, fingers and leg bones as well as other barely healed fractures to the front and back of Megan's skull.

In 1998, Megan and her older sister were left to live with Origel after their own mother died of a drug overdose. Relatives made attempts to locate and visit the sisters but were prevented by Origel from doing so, except for a brief visit allowed by Origel with Megan's older sister. At the time of the visit, Origel told Megan's relatives that she was away with her father, when in fact young Megan was in Origel's home all along. In March of 2000, when Jean Ford, Megan's great aunt, was unable to locate either Origel or the sisters, she began contacting authorities who told her that the older sister had been removed from Origel's home due to physical and mental abuse. When a family visit with the older sister was coordinated with Child Protect Services, Ford was told that the last time she saw her little sister, Megan was lying in a bathtub covered in blood. The child gave details explaining how Origel had struck four-year-old Megan with a metal pipe and broken the child's leg. An investigation led deputies to the discovery of Megan's body, wrapped in a quilt, covered with a plastic bag, placed in a box, and buried in a deep hole in the backyard of Origel's home. During an interview, Origel told investigators that after Megan died, she stored the child's body in a locked freezer at her previous home before transporting it to a new residence where she dug a grave and buried the child when no one else was around to witness it.

Office: 832 12th Street, Suite 300 Modesto, CA 95354 Mailing: PO BOX 442 Modesto, CA 95353  
Telephone: (209) 525-5550 Fax: (209) 558-4027 [www.stanislaus-da.org](http://www.stanislaus-da.org)



<https://www.facebook.com/StanislausDistrictAttorney/>

On October 10, 2002, Origel appeared in Stanislaus County Superior Court and pled no contest to first degree murder and child abuse. She was subsequently sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.

Since going to prison, Origel violated various rules and was reprimanded for such things as failing to submit to a urine test, circumventing mail procedures, being out of bounds, failing to report to her education assignment, and angrily throwing an object at an Officer's station. In 2012, Origel tried to take the blame for a murder committed by her son who was convicted of the crime and currently in prison.

During an interview with a prison psychologist prior to the hearing, Origel denied breaking Megan's bones, claiming she only used an open hand whenever striking Megan. She said that she "panicked" when she found the child had died and put the body in her freezer. The psychologist noted that Origel's statements indicated she felt she had nothing to do with the child's death, were inconsistent with the physical evidence in the case, and showed a lack of self-awareness that made her unsuitable for release on parole.

When testifying during the hearing on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, Origel became visibly agitated, defensive and even angry when questioned by the Board, talking over the Commissioners to give excuses for reprimands she received while in prison. When asked by the board how she would control her anger in the future, Origel testified she had learned "coping skills" to deal with it.

Prosecutor Roen requested the Board ask Origel whether she thought she had used those "coping skills" during the hearing. Origel admitted she had not and understood that she failed to remain compliant and calm. Roen then argued to the board that, in addition to Origel's lack of self-control, she was still engaging in criminal thinking by conveniently lying to avoid responsibility for her actions and requested parole be denied.

Megan's older sisters and their great aunt, Ms. Ford, appeared at the hearing and made victim impact statements to the board. Megan's older sister gave a detailed account of the abuse she and Megan suffered at the hands of Origel and stated that her appearance at the hearing was in memory and honor of her little sister Megan.

After deliberations, the Board denied parole for a period of five years. The Board found that Origel's history of lying to cover up her crime and her behavior during the hearing showed she lacked any credibility and still exhibited the anger and lack of self-control that led her to engage in horrific child abuse that led to a four-year-old child's murder. In total, the Board felt that Origel had not changed in any significant way since entering prison.

Her next parole hearing may be advanced to an earlier date if she can show a change in circumstances to the Board.

###

Office: 832 12th Street, Suite 300 Modesto, CA 95354 Mailing: PO BOX 442 Modesto, CA 95353

Telephone: (209) 525-5550 Fax: (209) 558-4027 www.stanislaus-da.org



<https://www.facebook.com/StanislausDistrictAttorney/>