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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: October 24, 2024
Re: Don Juan Cornelius
"Three Strikes" Inmate Denied Parole

For More Information Contact:

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Jeff Laugero announced today that Don Juan Cornelius, age 71, of Modesto was found unsuitable for parole during an October 10, 2024 hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings at Sierra Conservation Center in Jamestown. Deputy District Attorney Holly MacKinnon appeared at the hearing on behalf of the People.

On May 12, 1999, Cornelius entered Costco store in Modesto, placed three cartons of cigarettes under his jacket and left the store without paying. He attempted to run away from loss prevention officers but was arrested and placed into custody. Cornelius's criminal history included prior convictions for petty theft, robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, manslaughter, numerous parole violations and numerous prior prison terms.

On October 12, 2000, Cornelius was convicted by a jury of petty theft with priors. His prior serious and violent felony convictions under California's "Three Strikes" law were used to increase his sentence to 25 years to life in state prison.

Since his admission to prison, Cornelius has committed numerous rules violations including fighting, battery, and mutual combat. In 2014, Cornelius was convicted of another life offense when he viciously assaulted a fellow inmate with a horseshoe.

A prison psychologist who examined Cornelius in 2024 gave the opinion that he still posed a moderate (higher moderate) risk for violence if he were to be released into the community. The psychologist felt Cornelius had been afforded ample opportunities to alter his criminal behavior but failed to make the necessary changes to transform his life.

Prosecutor MacKinnon asked the Board to deny parole, pointing out that Cornelius had not participated in a sufficient amount of programming and had inadequate parole release plans, making him an unreasonable risk of danger to the community if he were to be released from prison.

After deliberation, the Board denied parole for three years, stating that Cornelius had not exhibited sufficient offender change, lacked empathy and failed to take responsibility for his actions. The Board felt he needed more victim awareness and criminal thinking programming.

This was Cornelius's first parole hearing. Due to his age, he is eligible for elder parole consideration and may petition the Board for another hearing earlier than in three years should his circumstances support it.

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