

TEXAS DEFENDER SERVICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, June 28, 2007

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U.S. SUPREME COURT SAYS THAT TEXAS MAY NOT EXECUTE SEVERELY MENTALLY ILL MAN

REVERSES DECISION ALLOWING EXECUTION OF SCHIZOPHRENIC MAN WHO REPRESENTED HIMSELF AT TRIAL WEARING PURPLE COWBOY COSTUME

Austin, Texas – Texas may not execute a severely mentally ill man who believes his execution would be the result of a satanic conspiracy to prevent him from preaching the Gospels of Jesus rather than for murdering his wife’s parents, the U.S. Supreme Court said today.

Scott Louis Panetti, 49, was allowed to represent himself at his capital murder trial in 1995, despite having been involuntarily committed to mental hospitals over a dozen times in the years leading up to the crime. Mr. Panetti defended himself dressed in a purple cowboy outfit and wanted to subpoena John F. Kennedy, the Pope, and Jesus.

Gregory W. Wiercioch, a staff attorney with Texas Defender Service who argued the case before the Supreme Court in April, hailed the decision. He said, “The Supreme Court today reaffirms the wisdom of a legal principle nearly a thousand years old – that the execution of persons like Scott Panetti serves no purpose and offends our sense of decency and common humanity.”

“Today the Supreme Court recognized that executing Scott Panetti would be a mindless, meaningless, and miserable spectacle,” said Mr. Wiercioch.

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Since his conviction and death sentence, Mr. Panetti’s mental condition has deteriorated even

further. Although he is aware that he killed his parents-in-law, he suffers from psychotic delusions that cause him to believe that demonic forces have conspired with the State of Texas to put a stop to his preaching by seeking his execution.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled that Mr. Panetti's execution could proceed – despite his irrational, delusional belief that had no connection with his crime. The Supreme Court reversed and held that the execution of persons whose severe mental illness deprives them of the ability to rationally understand the reason they are to be put to death is cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The decision represents the fourth time this term that the U.S. Supreme Court has overturned a ruling by a Texas state or federal court allowing an execution to proceed. (See *Jalil Abdul-Kabir, fka Ted Cole v. Quarterman* (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, issued Apr. 25, 2007), *Brent Brewer v. Quarterman* (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, issued Apr. 25, 2007), and *LaRoyce Smith v. Texas* (Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, issued Apr. 25, 2007)).

A short documentary about Scott Panetti's medical history, along with excerpts from the trial transcript and compelling facts of Scott's mental history can be accessed at:

www.texasdefender.org.

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