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For Immediate Release

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Texas Court of Criminal Appeals rules serial rapist/murderer won't die for his crime

(Fort Worth, TX) – Juan Segundo was convicted of capital murder in 2006 for the 1986 murder and sexual assault of 11-year-old Vanessa Villa. She was strangled and raped inside her home while her family was out running errands.

The case went cold until Segundo was arrested in 2005. Between Villa's death and Segundo's arrest, he raped and killed two other women.

After Segundo's conviction, his attorneys through the years filed more than a dozen claims, including one that he was intellectually disabled and should not be executed.

Courts rejected the claims under medical diagnostic criteria for intellectual disability standards that existed at the time. Segundo has been awaiting execution since a Tarrant County jury sentenced him to death in 2006.

In 2018, Segundo's attorneys argued that the previous claim of intellectual disability had been analyzed under "an unconstitutional standard" and should be re-examined.

Two updated diagnostic criteria for intellectual disabilities – the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities – were used to evaluate his status. Neither of these manuals "represents the precise state of the diagnostic criteria for ID as it existed" when Segundo was first evaluated for his trial, court records show.

Forensic psychologist Dr. Stephen A. Thorne changed his mind about Segundo's intellectual status because of the shift in diagnostic criteria in the newest manuals. The diagnostic criteria detailed in the manuals were "revised so drastically and pervasively that what it even means to be intellectually disabled has substantively changed, that only means that the mental health experts' understanding of the condition has evolved," according to a ruling by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.

The Court on Wednesday stated that Segundo now is considered intellectually disabled, which makes him ineligible for the death penalty.

The Court reformed the death sentence to a life sentence. He will be eligible for parole in 2026.