



The Government Shutdown Is About to Increase Childhood Hunger. Here's Why.



An academic expert on students with disabilities and the school-to-prison pipeline is urging the public to request clemency for a death row inmate facing execution today, at 10 a.m. CT.

Tremaine Wood, 46, is on death row for his [role](#) in the 2001 Oklahoma City robbery and murder of 19-year-old Ronnie Wipf. Although Wood participated in the robbery, it was his brother, Zjaiton Wood, who confessed to the murder. That brother, who was sentenced to life in prison, died of suicide in [2019](#).

Prosecutors maintain that Tremaine Wood is a hardened criminal who has continued to make trouble behind bars. But the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board [recommended last week](#) that Governor Kevin Stitt (kevin.stitt@gov.ok.gov; 405-521-2342) commute his sentence to life in prison.

In recommending clemency, the Board [took into account](#) the ineffective

legal representation Wood received from an attorney—now dead—who was struggling with addiction to cocaine and alcohol at the time and admitted to spending just two hours on the case.

The Board also received a report from NEPC Fellow [Dan Losen](#), Senior Director of the Education team at the [National Center for Youth Law](#), according to [The 74](#), an education-focused news outlet that earlier this week published an extensive report on the case.

Losen, who had access to educational, medical, court and Department of Health and Human Services records, conducted an investigation into Wood's years at Stillwater Middle School in the early 1990s. He found that Wood faced severe abuse that included watching his father, a police officer, tie his mother to a chair, douse her with alcohol, and threaten to light her on fire, before going on to beat his sons.

When Wood experienced learning and behavioral issues (including chronic absenteeism) in the wake of the abuse, school officials neither referred him to child protective services nor evaluated him for special education. Rather, he was suspended for a period lasting from the final months of his sixth-grade year to the second semester of seventh grade. The former assistant principal of the middle school told Losen that school officials “just wanted Tremane out.”

Exclusionary discipline (such as suspensions and expulsions) is [associated](#) with higher rates of subsequent incarceration, even after accounting for other relevant factors.

“Educators in OK chose to punish Tremane harshly when he was a traumatized youth in their care, despite awareness of his abusive and dangerous home,” Losen wrote in an email this week. “They also failed to evaluate Tremane for a disability, despite indicating that they suspected he had a disability.”

Losen points out that a special education designation could have prevented Wood's extraordinarily long suspension, since the law establishes legal protections that would have required school officials to come up with a different approach, such as placing Wood in an alternative program.

He added that even though most children involved in the juvenile justice system have disabilities, only a minority receive support or services at school. Losen's report demonstrates that Wood's behavior and grades improved during two periods when he was removed from his violent home and placed in a therapeutic foster home and a Department of Juvenile Justice treatment program.

Oklahoma's education system failed Wood when he was a student. Indirectly, that education system failed Ronnie Wipf. "It will be a grave miscarriage of justice should the state now extinguish Tremane's life, despite the Pardon and Parole Board's recommendation for clemency," Losen said in his email.

Oklahoma's governor has [previously](#) granted clemency one time, in 2021. Wood also has an appeal pending before the U.S. Supreme Court, which regularly rejects such appeals.

NEPC Resources on Discipline Policy

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