No

IN THE
SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES
KARINA YOHERA FLORES - PETITIONER

VS.

THE STATE OF TEXAS - RESPONDENT

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO

THE COURT OF APPEALS, THIRTEENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT,

CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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I. Questions Presented

Did the Court of Appeals, Thirteenth Judicial District, Corpus Christi, Texas err by affirming the trial court's order that no jury punishment hearing would occur, which was issued without notice or prior hearing on the day jury voir dire and trial were to begin? ¹

Did the Court of Appeals, Thirteenth Judicial District, Corpus Christi, Texas err by affirming the trial court's ruling that there were no lesser included offenses of capital murder other than murder? ²

Did the Court of Appeals, Thirteenth Judicial District, Corpus Christi, Texas err when it used procedural default to justify the trial court's refusal to allow any lesser included offenses to be inserted into the trial court's guilt/innocence charge to the jury? ³

II. A List of all proceedings in state trial and appellate courts

In the 24th Judicial District Court of Jackson County, Texas, Cause No. 2209-11259, The State of Texas v. Karina Yohera Flores, Jury found Karina Yohera Flores guilty of capital murder, 11/10/2022.

In the 24th Judicial District Court of Jackson County, Texas, Cause No. 2209-11259, The State of Texas v. Karina Yohera Flores, Judge denied Karina Yohera Flores a punishment hearing and sentenced her to a term of life without the possibility of parole, 11/10/2022..

In the 24th Judicial District Court of Jackson County, Texas, Cause No. 2209-11259, The State of Texas v. Karina Yohera Flores, Karina Yohera Flores filed a motion for new trial, 11/10/2022

In the 24th Judicial District Court of Jackson County, Texas, Cause No. 2209-11259, The State of Texas v. Karina Yohera Flores, The Court denied Karina Yohera Flores' motion for new trial, 11/10/2022

In the 24th Judicial District Court of Jackson County, Texas, Cause No. 2209-11259, The State of Texas v. Karina Yohera Flores, Karina Yohera Flores, by her court appointed appellate attorney, David Disher, filed her notice of appeal, 12/19/2022

In the Court of Appeals Thirteenth Judicial District Corpus Christi, Texas, Case No. 13-22-00596-CR, Karina Yohera Flores v. The State of Texas, Memorandum Opinion issued, Affirmed, 12/05/2024

In the Court of Appeals Thirteenth Judicial District Corpus Christi, Texas, Case No. 13-22-00596-CR, Karina Yohera Flores v. The State of Texas, Motion for Rehearing filed, 2/20/2025

In the Court of Appeals Thirteenth Judicial District Corpus Christi, Texas, Case No. 13-22-00596-CR, Karina Yohera Flores v. The State of Texas, Motion for en banc reconsideration filed, 2/20/2025

In the Court of Appeals Thirteenth Judicial District Corpus Christi, Texas, Case No. 13-22-00596-CR, Karina Yohera Flores v. The State of Texas, Motion Rehearing denied, 3/11/2025 In the Court of Appeals Thirteenth Judicial District Corpus Christi, Texas, Case No. 13-22-00596-CR, Karina Yohera Flores v. The State of Texas, Motion for en banc reconsideration denied, 3/11/2025

Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas, PD-0182-25, Appellant's Petition for Discretionary Review filed, Deana Williamson, Clerk, Karina Yohera Flores, Appellant, Petitioner Herein vs. The State of Texas, Appellee, 3/26/2025

Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas, PD-0182-25, Appellant's petition for discretionary review refused, Karina Yohera Flores, Appellant, Petitioner Herein vs. The State of Texas, Appellee, 5/28/2025

Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas, PD-0182-25, Appellant's motion for rehearing filed, Karina Yohera Flores, Appellant, Petitioner Herein vs. The State of Texas, Appellee, 6/09/2025

Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas, PD-0182-25, Motion for Rehearing denied, Karina Yohera Flores, Appellant, Petitioner Herein vs. The State of Texas, Appellee, 7/02/2025

III. Table of Contents

		Page number
I.	Questions Presented	. ii
II.	A List of all proceedings in state trial and appellate courts	. iii
III.	Table of Contents	. V
IV.	Table of Authorities	. vi
V.	Petition for Writ of Certiorari	. 1
VI.	Opinion Below	. 1
VII.	Jurisdiction	. 2
VIII.	Constitutional Provisions Involved	. 3
IX. S	Statement of the Case	. 4
	1. This case involves a capital murder prosecution without the death p	enalty, where
	the trial court denied a jury punishment hearing and no voir dire reg	garding
	punishment issues on the day trial was to begin. The trial court also	ruled that
	there were no lesser included offenses of capital murder other than	murder. ¹³ On
	November 10, 2022, the jury found Karina Yohera Flores guilty of	capital murder,
	and the trial court sentenced her to life in prison without parole. 14	
X. R	Leasons for Granting the Writ	. 6
	A decision by a state court of last resort has so far	
	departed from the accepted and usual course of judicial	
	proceedings, or sanctioned such a departure by a lower	
	court, as to call for an exercise of this Court's	
	supervisory power.	
XI. A	Argument	. 8

XII. Conclusion	13
XIII. Appendix	16

IV. Table of Authorities

Constitutions	
U.S. CONST. amend V ⁴	3, 14
U.S. CONST. amend VI ⁵	11, 14
U.S. CONST. amend XIV, § 1 ⁶	3, 14
Statutes	
28 U.S.C. § 1257	2
Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. Article 27.02(7) (West 1974) 7	14
Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann Article 36.01(a)(8) (West 1987)	8
Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. Article 37.07 (West 2019)	8
Tex. Penal Code § 19.02(b)(3) (West 1994) 8	14
Tex. Penal Code § 19.04 (West 1994) 9	14
Cases	
Almanza v. State, 686 S.W.2d 157 (Tex. Crim. App. 1985) 10	14
Arizona v. Fulminante, 499 U.S. 279, 310 (1991)	11
Bridges v. State, 389 S.W.3d 508 (Tex. App. – Houston [14 th Dist.] 2012, no pet.)	9
Bell v. State, 693 S.W.2d 434 (Tex.Crim.App. 1985) 11	14
Bradford v. State, 178 S.W.3d 875 (Tex. AppFort Worth 2005, pet. ref'd)	11
Cardenas v. State, 30 S.W.3d 384 (Tex. Crim. App. 2000)	10, 11
Flores v. State, 245 S.W.3d 432 (Tex. Crim. App. 2008) 12	11, 14
Goad v. State, 354 S.W.3d 443(Tex. Crim. App. 2011)	9
Hudson v. State, 449 S.W.3d 495 (Tex. Crim. App. 2014)	11
Lilly v. State, 365 S.W.3d 321 (Tex. Crim. App. 2012)	11
Neder v. United States, 527 U.S. 1, 13 (1999)	12
Salinas v. State, 163 S.W.3d 734 (Tex. Crim. App. 2005)	10
Sweed v. State, 351 S.W.3d 63 (Tex. Crim. App. 2011)	9

Weaver v. Massachusetts, 137 S. Ct. 1899, 1908 (2017)	11, 12
Publications	
George McCall Secrest, Jr., O'Connor's Texas	
Criminal Code Plus 2022-2023, pg. C-40	11

V. Petition For Writ of Certiorari

Karina Yohera Flores, an inmate incarcerated at Christina Melton Crain Unit in Gatesville,
Texas, by and through David Alan Disher, her attorney, appointed in the Texas Courts below,
respectfully petitions this court for a writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the Court of
Appeals Thirteenth Judicial District Corpus Christi, Texas.

VI. Opinion Below

The Court of Appeals Thirteenth Judicial District Corpus Christi, Texas ordered the opinion as "Do not publish." However, the unpublished opinion can be found at 2024 WL 4986400. The opinion affirmed the trial court. The Court's Order and Opinion is attached at Appendix pages 1-31. No other opinions occurred.

VII. Jurisdiction

Karina Yohera Flores's appeal to the Court of Appeals Thirteenth Judicial District Corpus Christi, Texas affirmed her conviction for capital murder and sentence to imprisonment for life without parole, December 5, 2024.

Karina Yohera Flores's Petition for Discretionary Review was timely filed March 26, 2025 in the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals refused her Petition without issuing an opinion May 28, 2025. The notice by the court is included in the Appendix. However, the court permitted the filing of a motion for rehearing within 15 days of the refusal. Petitioner timely filed her Motion for rehearing June 9, 2025.

Karina Yohera Flores' Motion for Rehearing to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals was denied without issuing an opinion on July 2, 2025. The court's notice of denial is included in the Appendix.

Karina Yohera Flores invokes this Court's jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1257, having timely filed this petition for a Writ of Certiorari within ninety days of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals' denial of Petitioner's Motion for Rehearing.

VIII. Constitutional Provisions Involved

United States Constitution, Amendment V:

In relevant part, "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law."

United States Constitution, Amendment VI:

In relevant part, "In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall have the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed,"

United States Constitution, Amendment XIV:

In relevant part, "Nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law."

IX. Statement of the Case

A. Introduction

This case involves a capital murder prosecution without the death penalty, where the trial court denied any future jury punishment hearing and no voir dire regarding punishment issues on the day trial was to begin. The trial court also ruled that there were no lesser included offenses of capital murder other than murder. ¹³ On or about the 10th day of November 2022 the Jury found Karina Yohera Flores, Appellant, guilty of Count 1—Capital Murder (C.R., pg. 112). Same date, the trial court denied Appellant a punishment hearing and sentenced her to the institutional division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for a term of life without the possibility of parole. ¹⁴ (1st. Supp. C.R., pgs. 10-13).

On or about the 10th day of November 2022 the Appellant, Karina Yohera Flores, filed the Trial Court's Certification of Defendant's Right of Appeal. (C.R., pg. 119). On or about the 10th day of November 2022, the Appellant, Karina Yohera Flores, filed a Motion for New Trial. (C.R., pgs. 120-122). On or about the 10th day of November 2022, the Court signed the Order Denying the Motion for New Trial. (C.R., pg. 123). On or about the 19th day of December 2022, the Appellant, Karina Yohera Flores, filed the Notice of Appeal. (C.R., pg. 124).

B. Statement of facts (that led to the case)

Some of the facts which occurred or did not occur to establish the more than a scintilla of evidence requirement supporting a lesser included offense include:

- 1. Appellant did bring her son to the hospital. (R.R. 10, pg. 31).
- 2. Appellant did "entered our hospital double doors. She was -- looked distraught, yelling, "Somebody help me. Help me. Or help my baby 'help'". (R.R. 10, pg. 31).

3. Appellant did perform CPR upon her son. (R.R. 10, pgs. 171-172).

Appellant did not attempt to conceal her son from the authorities by burying him, dismembering him, or throwing him into the Navidad River or the Gulf of Mexico. No record of her doing any of the items listed herein exists concerning reprehensible things she could have done if she wanted to murder her son and conceal any guilt she might have had.

The autopsy report concerning the death of the child, Nehemiah Gabriel Flores, specifically states that the child died on March 1, 2021, from an acute injury to his brain that was suffered on February 25, 2021. (13 R.R., pgs. 110-111, State's Exhibit 451). None of the State's expert witnesses offered any testimony, within a reasonable degree of medical certainty, that the Appellant caused the blow that caused the death of the child. (12 R.R., pgs. 138-139, 140, 177; 13 R.R., pg. 119; 14 R.R., pgs. 61-62). The Appellant in this case, Karina Flores, gave an oral and written statement to law enforcement that said injury was caused by the child falling in the bathtub while she was present on February 25, 2021. (R.R. 10, pg. 84), (11 R.R., pgs. 228-229; State's Exhibit No. 261).

The State began its voir dire of the jury. (R.R. 9, pg. 77).

C. Procedural History

1. Proceedings in the trial court

November 10, 2022, the trial court, 24th District Court of Jackson County, Texas, only held half of a trial, excluding the punishment hearing, and this resulted in a conviction for capital murder and incarceration for life without the possibility of parole.

1. Proceedings in the appellate court

December 5, 2024, the Court of Appeals, Thirteenth District of Texas, issued a memorandum opinion affirming the case below and ordered, "Do not publish".

X. Reasons for Granting the Writ

A decision by a state court of last resort has so far departed from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings, or sanctioned such a departure by a lower court, as to call for an exercise of this Court's supervisory power.

2.

Denial of Jury Punishment Hearing: The trial court's decision to deny a jury punishment hearing without notice or prior hearing violates the constitutional rights of the petitioner. The appellate court's affirmation of this decision disregards established legal precedents that ensure a defendant's right to a fair trial. ¹⁵

2.

Lesser Included Offenses: The trial court's ruling that there were no lesser included offenses of capital murder other than murder is erroneous. This decision prevented the jury from considering other potential charges, which could have resulted in a different verdict or sentence including, but not limited to, community supervision or the possibility of parole. ¹⁶

3.

Procedural Default: The appellate court's reliance on procedural default to justify the trial court's refusal to include lesser included offenses in the jury charge is flawed. The petitioner provided sufficient evidence to warrant consideration of these offenses, and the court's failure to do so constitutes a miscarriage of justice. ¹⁷

XI. Argument

A decision by a state court of last resort has so far departed from the accepted and usual course of judicial proceedings, or sanctioned such a departure by a lower court, as to call for an exercise of this Court's supervisory power. Texas has a bifurcated system of criminal justice. Normally, the first phase of a criminal trial involves the determination of guilty or not guilty of the charged offense. If a not guilty verdict is entered, the trial ends. If a guilty verdict is entered, the trial then proceeds to the punishment phase of the trial. The structure of a criminal case is further amplified by *Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann Article 36.01(a)(8) (West 1987)*, wherein it states, "In the event of a finding of guilty, the trial shall proceed as set forth in Article 37.07." *Article 37.07* is entitled VERDICT MUST BE GENERAL; SEPARATE HEARING ON PUNISHMENT.

The trial court decided before the trial began that there would be no punishment phase.

The judge based his opinion on the false belief that no lesser-included offenses of capital murder other than murder existed. Petitioner believes that this error is structural.

The Judge's misunderstanding of the state of the law undermined Petitioner's right to due process under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution.

The Judge would not allow the panel to be advised of any punishment hearing. This ruling set the stage to not permit any punishment other than life without parole assuming a guilty verdict. If Petitioner were to receive a fair trial, she might have been awarded community supervision or a term of incarceration with the possibility of parole.

According to the trial court,

"The State of the law is that you're only entitled to a lesser if there is testimony in the whole trial that if the defendant is guilty, she is only guilty of the lesser included." (R.R. 16, pg. 123).

Appellant disagrees with the court's language and finds no caselaw to support it. In fact, it appears the trial court is trying to diminish the jury's role as factfinder.

The Court did not answer the question, 'What is required to get a lesser included offense into the court's charge?' The court did not include the concept of 'Beyond a scintilla of evidence' nor did it follow the dictates of <u>Bridges</u>, <u>Goad</u> and <u>Sweed</u>.

Relevant facts:

On or about the 9th day of September 2022, the District Clerk of Jackson County, Texas filed an indictment, indicting Appellant with Count 1, Capital Murder and Count 2, Injury to a Child, Serious Bodily Injury. (C.R., pgs. 38-40).

On or about the 6th day of October 2022, Appellant filed Defendant's jury election for punishment pertaining to Count 2 (Injury to a Child – Serious Bodily Injury). (C.R., pgs. 51-52).

On or about the 7th day of October 2022, the Court entered an Order Granting Defendant's Jury Election. (C.R. pg. 65).

On or about the 28th day of October 2022, the District Clerk of Jackson County, Texas sent an email to all parties notifying them in relevant part, "Judge Bell He also wants it to be clear that voir dire not include punishment information." (C.R., pg. 84).

On or about the 31st day of October, 2022, Karina Yohera Flores, Appellant, filed the Defendant's Objection to The Court's Notice Regarding Voir Dire And Punishment Information. (C.R., pgs. 85-86). The Court allowed some discussion concerning the Appellant's objection on the voir dire problem as follows:

"THE COURT: I don't care. I have this one in my hand. This is Objection to the Court's Notice Regarding Voir Dire and Punishment Information. Okay. She is correct that the Court is not going to permit voir dire on the punishment, and for purposes of the record, this is a non-

death capital case, and the only thing that makes it a non-death capital, as opposed to murder, is that the victim was under the age of 10. And so, I don't believe -- it even says, looking in the statute under 12.31, it says, "In a capital felony trial in which the State does not seek the death penalty, prospective jurors shall be informed that the state is not seeking the death penalty and that a sentence of life without parole is mandatory on conviction of the capital felony." Since it is mandatory, there will be no voir dire on lesser includeds because there is no lesser includeds, and if you want to argue, well, the jury could find that the victim wasn't under 10, argue it, but I am going to deny it on that basis. The only thing that makes this capital is that the deceased is under the age of 10, and so I am instructing the attorneys to not voir dire the jury on punishment since they will have no say in the punishment phase of the hearing -- of the case, okay?" (R.R. 9, pgs. 9,10).

The trial court overruled Appellant's objection to the court's notice regarding voir dire and punishment information. (R.R. 9, pg. 14).

The State began its voir dire of the jury. (R.R. 9, pg. 77).

The following offenses are lesser included offenses of Capital Murder:

- Felony murder Tex. Penal Code § 19.02(b)(3) (West 1994,) Salinas v. State, 163 S.W.3d
 734, 741 (Tex.Crim.App. 2005).
- 2. **Manslaughter** Tex. Penal Code § 19.04 (West 1994), *Cardenas v. State*, 30 S.W.3d 384, 392 (Tex. Crim. App. 2000).
- 3. Criminally negligent homicide Tex. Penal Code § 19.05 (West 1994), *Cardenas v. State*, 30 S.W.3d 384, 392 (Tex. Crim. App. 2000).

- 4. **Aggravated assault** Tex. Penal Code § 22.02 (West 2021), *Cardenas v. State*, 30 S.W.3d 384, 392 (Tex. Crim. App. 2000).
- 5. Injury to a child Tex. Penal Code § 22.04 (West 2021), <u>Hudson v. State</u>, 449 S.W.3d 495, 497-98 (Tex.Crim.App. 2014).
- 6. **Deadly conduct** Tex. Penal Code § 22.05 (West 1994), *Flores v. State*, 245 S.W.3d 432, 440 (Tex.Crim.App. 2008).

The above cases held that the six offenses are lesser included offenses of capital murder.

Also, robbery, aggravated robbery, and kidnapping are lesser included offenses of capital murder but are not relevant to the injuries of the child, N. A. F., the victim in this case. **See Bradford v. State**, 178 S.W.3d 875, 877 (Tex. App.---Fort Worth 2005, **pet. ref'd**).

All above statutes and cases relevant to lesser included offenses of capital murder may be found in a table of *George McCall Secrest*, *Jr.*, *O'Connor's Texas Criminal Code Plus 2022-2023*, pg. C-40.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that a violation of the Sixth Amendment right to a public trial is a structural error. *Weaver v. Massachusetts*, 137 S. Ct. 1899, 1908 (2017); *Lilly*, 365 S.W.3d 321,328 (Tex.Crim.App. 2012). Structural errors "affect [] the framework within which the trial proceeds," and are not merely errors "in the trial process itself." *Arizona v.*Fulminante, 499 U.S. 279, 310 (1991). "The purpose of the structural error doctrine is to ensure insistence on certain basic, constitutional guarantees that should define the framework of any criminal trial." *Weaver*, 137 S. Ct. at 1907. A violation resulting in a structural error does not require a showing of harm—it is impervious to a harm analysis. *Fulminante*, 499 U.S. at 309–10; *Lily*, 365 S.W.3d 321,328 (Tex.Crim.App. 2012). "[I]n the case of a structural error where there is an objection at trial and the issue is raised on direct appeal, the defendant generally is

entitled to 'automatic reversal' regardless of the error's actual 'effect on the outcome.'" *Weaver*, 137 S. Ct. at 1910 (quoting *Neder v. United States*, 527 U.S. 1, 7 (1999)).

XII. Conclusion

For the reasons stated above, the petitioner respectfully requests that this Court grant the writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the 13th Court of Appeals of Texas.

FOOTNOTES

- 1. "Did the appeals court err by affirming the trial court's order that no jury punishment hearing would occur by order of the trial court, which order was issued through the District Clerk without notice or prior hearing on the day jury voir dire and trial was to begin but prior to the start of jury voir dire and trial? (C.R., pg. 84)."
- 2. "Did the appeals court err by affirming the trial court's ruling issued on the day trial was to begin but prior to the start of trial that there were no lesser included offenses of capital murder other than murder? (R.R. 9, pgs. 9-10)."
- 3. "Did the appeals court err when it used procedural default to justify the trial court's refusal to allow any lesser included offenses be inserted into the trial court's guilt/innocence charge to the jury? (Opinion p. 17, n. 6)"
- 4. "U.S. CONST. amend V. (PD-0182-25, pgs. 18, 23)"
- 5. "U.S. CONST. amend VI (PD-0182-25, pgs. 18, 23)"
- 6. "U.S. CONST. amend XIV, § 1 (PD-0182-25, pgs. 18, 23)"
- 7. "Tex. Crim. Proc. Code Ann. Article 27.02(7) (West 1974) (PD-0182-25, pgs. 18, 23)"
- 8. "Tex. Penal Code § 19.02 (b)(3) (West 1994) (PD-0182-25, pgs. 16, 18, 22, 23)"
- 9. "Tex. Penal Code § 19.04 (West 1994) (PD-0182-25, pgs. 17, 18, 22, 23)"
- 10. "Almanza v. State, 686 S.W.2d 157 (Tex. Crim. App. 1985) (op. on reh'g) (PD-0182-25, pgs. 27, 28)"
- 11. "Bell v. State, 693 S.W.2d 434 (Tex.Crim.App. 1985) (PD-0182-25, pg. 26)"
- 12. "Flores v. State, 245 S.W.3d 432 (Tex. Crim. App. 2008) (PD-0182- 25, pgs. 17, 22)"
- 13. "This case involves a Capital Murder prosecution without the death penalty but no jury punishment hearing by order of the trial court on the day trial was to begin but prior to the start of trial. The trial court also ruled, on the day trial was to begin but prior to the start of trial that there were no lesser included offenses of capital murder other than murder." (PD-0182-25, pg. 10)
- 14. "On or about the 10th day of November 2022 the Jury found Karina Yohera Flores, Appellant, guilty of Count 1-Capital Murder (C.R., pg. 112)."
- 15. "Did the appeals court err by affirming the trial court's order that no jury punishment hearing would occur by order of the trial court, which order was issued through the District Clerk without notice or prior hearing on the day jury voir dire and trial was to begin but prior to the start of jury voir dire and trial? (C.R., pg. 84)."
- 16. "Did the appeals court err by affirming the trial court's ruling issued on the day trial was to begin but prior to the start of trial that there were no lesser included offenses of capital murder other than murder? (R.R. 9, pgs. 9-10)."
- 17. "Did the appeals court err when it used procedural default to justify the trial court's refusal to allow any lesser included offenses be inserted into the trial court's guilt/innocence charge to the jury? (Opinion p. 17, n. 6)"
- 18. "Memorandum Opinion issued December 5, 2024"

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ David Alan Disher

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Dated: September 24, 2025

XIII. Appendix

Memorandum Opinion and Judgment issued December 5, 2024 18

Appendix Table of Contents

	Page number
Opinion issued by the Court of Appeals, Thirteenth District of Texas,	
Corpus Christi – Edinburg, December 5, 2024	1
Judgment issued by the Court of Appeals, Thirteenth District of Texas,	
Corpus Christi – Edinburg, December 5, 2024	31
Notice of refusal from the Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas,	
May 28, 2025	32
Notice of denial from the Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas,	
July 2, 2025	33