



## RHODE ISLAND BROTHERHOOD OF CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

*"Representing Those Who Work the Toughest Beat in the State"*

---

PO Box 8273, Cranston, Rhode Island 02920

Phone (401) 943-4110

Fax (401) 943-8480

April 3, 2025

Honorable Members  
Rhode Island House Judiciary

Dear Representative:

I am writing to express the Rhode Island Brotherhood of Correctional Officers strong opposition for bill H-5297, this bill would allow and implement conjugal visits at the ACI.

As of 1995, 17 states provided for conjugal visits. Today only four states still allow them. California, New York, Connecticut and Washington. Mississippi and New Mexico stopped allowing visits as of 2014.

Recently, two women were strangled to death by their husbands during conjugal visits in California. I have included two articles that described what happened.

This legislation would also prove extremely problematic and costly. Currently the Rhode Island Department of Corrections has the ability to provide inmates with social furloughs with immediate family members or other persons who have developed regular visitation patterns with the inmate. RI DOC policy 20.01 and RI General Laws 42-56-18 provide inmates access to social furloughs and is supported by the Correctional Officer staff if managed correctly.

It is with these facts in mind that the Rhode Island Brotherhood of Corrections respectfully requests that this committee reject this legislation.

Sincerely,

Richard Ferruccio

President, RIBCO

# Conjugal visits should be suspended after 2 women killed, California prosecutor says

*Two women were visiting their significant others in a California prison when they were allegedly killed last year.*



**Jeanine Santucci**

USA TODAY

- Two women were allegedly strangled by their partners during conjugal visits at a California prison in 2024.
- The Amador County District Attorney is calling for a suspension of the visits and a review of safety protocols.
- Conjugal visits, or "family visits," are allowed in only four U.S. states and are intended to promote rehabilitation and family connections.

The deaths of [two women during conjugal visits with their significant others at a California prison](#) last year should prompt a suspension of the visits altogether while authorities conduct a "top-to-bottom" review, the county's top prosecutor said Thursday.

"That's the responsible thing to do when you have two tragedies that have occurred in the same institution in the same program within a very short time span, is take a look at whether or not the protocol, policies and procedures are adequate," Amador County [District Attorney Todd Riebe](#) told USA TODAY in an interview.

The two women, 47-year-old Tania Thomas and 62-year-old Stephanie Brinson, who also went by Stephanie Dowells, were [both allegedly strangled](#) during what the state prison system calls "family visits" – extended visits in apartment-like facilities at Mule Creek State Prison in northern California, Riebe said.

Thomas' domestic partner Anthony Curry, 48, was charged with murder and accused of strangling her in July 2024. He was already serving a life sentence for attempted second-degree murder. Dowells' husband, 54-year-old David Brinson, hasn't yet been charged but is a suspect in her death in November, Riebe said. He was already serving a life sentence for murder, according to media reports.

The prosecutor's call for action joins those of family members like Thomas' cousin, Jeanine Rojo.

"Something needs to be done, and it should have been done two homicides ago," Rojo told [NBC News](#).

Only four U.S. states allow family members of inmates to participate in some form of a conjugal visit, and last year's tragedies have thrown the [controversy surrounding them into the national spotlight](#).

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation said in a statement to USA TODAY on Thursday that visits have not been suspended.

"Family visits were not modified or paused as a result of this incident and continue to be available to eligible incarcerated individuals," the agency said.

#### **DA calls for conjugal visits to be suspended**

Riebe called the deaths "hard to fathom" and said in his 30 years as chief public defender and then district attorney, he has never seen violent crimes during family visits at Mule Creek State Prison. Violence during conjugal visits appears to be rarely reported throughout the country.



"It's just hard to wrap your arms around how you could have two alleged homicides occur within six months of each other at the same institution during conjugals. It just boggles the mind," he said.

More: [Conjugal visit death reports mark a tragic turn for a controversial practice](#)

Riebe said prison officials should review the eligibility criteria for inmates to have family visits, evaluate safety procedures and consider using technology to ensure safety while respecting visitors' privacy.

Curry is scheduled be arraigned in court on April 3, Riebe said. An attorney wasn't listed to comment on Curry's behalf. While Brinson has not been charged in his wife's death, Riebe said he will review the evidence as he receives it from investigators.

### **Victims' families want the visitation process changed**

The families of both victims told NBC News they thought their loved ones shouldn't have been allowed to be alone with the men because of their histories of violent crimes, and that they want eligibility criteria changed. Privacy from the prying eyes of prison guards is a key feature of the visits, where family members can stay with inmates for 30 to 40 hours in apartment-like facilities on prison grounds.

"One thing I do want to know is how many other times has this happened at Mule Creek and it's gone undetected," Rojo told NBC.

Family visits are intended to "support positive family connections and successful rehabilitation," the California corrections department said. To be eligible for the program, inmates need to meet specific requirements and have good behavior, the department said.

The department didn't answer an inquiry about the history of violent incidents during conjugal visits in the state.

"I'm sick to my stomach that this happened to Tania, but then it happened again just months after her to Stephanie," Rojo told NBC News, adding, "and it should have been prevented."

## 2 Women Fatally Strangled On Conjugal Visits to Same Calif. Prison Months Apart

Tania Thomas, 47, and Stephanie Dowells, 62, were each allegedly strangled to death during conjugal visits with their husbands at Mule Creek State Prison

By

[Lesley Cosme Torres](#)

Lesley Cosme Torres is a writer at PEOPLE covering crime. She has been working at PEOPLE since 2025. Her work has previously appeared in the Tampa Bay Times, Miami Herald and NPR. [PEOPLE EDITORIAL GUIDELINES](#)

Published on March 27, 2025 04:07PM EDT

Two women were allegedly strangled to death during conjugal visits to their husbands at the same California prison — just four months apart.

Tania Thomas, 47, is believed to have been strangled to death while visiting her husband last July at Mule Creek State Prison in California.

Four months later, in November, Stephanie Dowells, 62, [was also reportedly strangled](#) while visiting her husband at the same facility, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation [told NBC](#).

Thomas' husband, Anthony Curry, is serving a life sentence for attempted second-degree murder, according to the outlet. He was recently charged with murder in connection with Thomas' killing.

Dowells' husband, David Brinson, 54, was initially convicted of murdering four men during a robbery in the 1990s and had been sentenced to four consecutive life terms without parole, according to NBC.

The Amador County Coroner's Office told NBC they ruled Dowells' death a homicide but are still investigating what caused her death.

"Something needs to be done, and it should have been done two homicides ago," Jeanine Rojo, Thomas' cousin, [said to NBC](#). "I'm sick to my stomach that this happened to Tania, but then it happened again just months after her to Stephanie," she added, "it should have been prevented."

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation says some incarcerated people are eligible for family visits which take place in apartment-like facilities on prison grounds. They can last from 30-40 hours, [according to their website](#).

“Only those who demonstrate sustained good behavior and meet specific program requirements are considered. These visits are designed to support positive family connections and successful rehabilitation,” the CDCR previously said in a statement to PEOPLE.

Both families say they want to see the eligibility change for those who are allowed conjugal visits, according to NBC. They believe neither Thomas’ husband or Dowells’ husband should have been allowed visits because they were convicted of violent crimes.

Dowells’ son, Armand Torres, 28, believes that these visits, however much supervision they have now, should be at a higher level.

**“I want them to take some accountability for this, the prison,” Dowells’ son Armand Torres, 28, said, per NBC. “Because what’s stopping the next person from killing their wife or son or anybody?”**