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Clemency urged for 2 murderers from the 1970s - Beebe must make final decision

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Two murderers, each imprisoned more than three decades, should be granted clemency, the Parole Board announced Thursday.

The board's recommendations are nonbinding. Gov. Mike Beebe will make the final decision. James Strouthers, 60, is serving a life sentence for a 1971 murder in Pulaski County. Strouthers denied committing the murder during a February clemency hearing. Details of the slaying were not included in his clemency documents nor were they immediately available in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette archives. During the February hearing, Strouthers, who attended alone without family or friends, promised to move out of state, according to notes by Commissioner Lynn Story. Strouthers' sister also wrote a letter to the board in which she also said her brother was innocent. Pulaski County Prosecuting Attorney Larry Jegley and Pulaski County Sheriff Doc Holladay objected to clemency for Strouthers, now an inmate at the Cummins Unit in Lincoln County. The board unanimously approved Strouthers' request, recommending that he become eligible for parole. In contrast, a rare 3-2 vote narrowly won Ronald Collier the board's support for his clemency request. Collier, 48, was convicted in October 1977 at age 18 of first-degree murder in Poinsett County. In his clemency application, Collier said he killed a woman who tried to prevent him from burglarizing her house. "I hit her and she died," he wrote. Further details of the crime, including the victim's name, were not included in the clemency documents and could not be located in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette's archives. Collier wrote in his application that he had "grown up out of the foolish kid I

once was" after three decades in prison."I feel I could live a productive life outside, never having been in trouble before and fully realizing how very much it has cost myself and family," Collier wrote.Poinsett County Sheriff Larry Mills is objecting to clemency for Collier.Collier noted on his application that he is in poor health, with an undisclosed life-threatening condition. He is permanently assigned to the Diagnostic Unit in Pine Bluff, which holds the prison system's most intensive medical services.Commissioner John Felts noted that Collier's mother and stepfather attended the February clemency hearing and that they "would love to have him home."Commissioners John Belken and Abraham Carpenter Jr. agreed with Felts that Collier should become parole eligible.Story and Commissioner Richard Mays Jr. disagreed, noting the nature and seriousness of the crime.Beebe has 240 business days to grant clemency, deny it or take no action, which would allow the men to reapply next year.

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