

## Prosecutors Opposes Juvenile Lifer Legislation

*By Jeff Getting, Kalamazoo County Prosecutor, and Doug Lloyd, Eaton County Prosecutor*

Proposed legislation eliminating sentences of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole for convicted murderers who were under 19 years old when they committed murder is poised to pass in the Michigan House and Senate. These bills would eliminate any possibility of a sentence imposing life in prison without parole for convicted murderers like the Oxford school shooter. They would also allow for his release after he serves just 10 years in prison for his crimes. Elected prosecutors from across the state, both Republican and Democrat, oppose this legislation. These bills leave families of murder victims without justice and decrease the safety of our communities.

Current Michigan law allows a judge to sentence a juvenile murderer to life in prison without the possibility of parole in extremely limited circumstances and only after a hearing that takes into consideration the facts and circumstances of the case, including such factors as the youth and immaturity of the defendant, the defendant's home life and environment at the time of the offense, the circumstances of the offense, and the influence of peer pressure. The result is that only defendants committing the most egregious murders, like the Oxford school shooter, are sentenced to life imprisonment with no chance of release. The proposed legislation completely overturns this; it does not allow for an individualized sentence, and it would absolutely prohibit a judge from imposing such a sentence, no matter how many people were killed or how horrific the murder might be.

If passed, Senate Bills 119-123 and House Bills 4160-4164 will *eliminate* even the possibility of life imprisonment without the chance of parole for defendants under 19, convicted of the most serious crime, first-degree murder. On top of taking this sentence option away for the most egregious offenders, these bills further add insult to injury by allowing the state Parole Board to release such a murderer on parole after serving just 10 years. In essence, the Oxford school shooter could only serve one year for each person he was convicted of killing, or trying to kill, and the parole board could then release him. Testifying before the Senate, Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan President-Elect and Kalamazoo County Prosecutor Jeff Getting, said "We are in favor of juveniles having second chances, but we are also in favor of juveniles who have committed the most horrific acts facing the ultimate consequence of the possibility of life without parole. These bills take even that possibility away for the most deserving."

Passing these bills mean that murderers like Federico Cruz, who beheaded another teenager and made videos of himself with the severed head, would be eligible for parole and possible release back into our community. It means likely parole for convicted murderers like Michael Kvam, who raped and killed a 27-year-old woman, her 9-year-old daughter, and her 15-year-old niece, who admits he belongs in prison, "'I'm not asking for forgiveness - I don't deserve it or want it. In fact, me spending the rest of my life in here is way better than I deserve...I would like to say that monsters do exist.'"

Michigan has a workable framework for ensuring that juveniles receive fair and just sentences. The proposed bills needlessly jeopardize the safety of our citizens and communities. That is why we, as elected prosecutors, oppose Senate Bills 119-123 and House Bills 4160-4164. We call upon the people we serve to keep our communities safe by asking that they voice their opposition to these bills to their

Representatives and Senators as well. Michigan's children and families deserve safe communities and to be assured that those committing the most heinous crimes will never be released.

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MONTCALM	Andrea	Krause
MUSKEGON	Dale (DJ)	Hilson
NEWAYGO	Ellsworth	Stay, Jr.
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ONTONAGON	Michael	Findlay
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