

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

BILL DESTEPH
8TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
PART OF THE CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH
588 CENTRAL DRIVE
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23454
(757) 321-8180



COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION

August 17, 2020

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

Once again, I write to you with serious concerns regarding the release of another convicted felon back onto the streets of our Commonwealth. Robert D. Godfrey has served only a small fraction of his 200-year sentence (13%) and yet the Parole Board seems determined to reward this man with the freedom that his victim, Albert Haywood Hamilton, will never enjoy.

As you know, the Inspector General recently exposed the Parole Board's violations of state law, as well as their own policies and procedures, in the release of murderer Vincent Martin. These actions alone give me cause to demand additional scrutiny into the release of Robert D. Godfrey. However, it is my understanding that Grayson Commonwealth Attorney has alerted your administration to "irregularities" in the Parole Board's handling of this case as well. Just how many convicted murderers and violent felons have to be released before you act?

I want to highlight several facts in the "overwhelmingly brutal" murder of Mr. Albert Hamilton: 68-year old Grayson County resident, Albert H. Hamilton, Sr. was shot multiple times in the head and neck, and his body was located in the New River, bound and weighted down with a cinder block. Godfrey plead guilty to all three crimes in which he was charged; however, he simultaneously denied his guilt and did not accept any responsibility for his actions. In 1994, Godfrey escaped from custody and was recaptured after 36 hours on the loose as a fugitive. While technically Godfrey did not receive a life sentence, a 200-year punishment is in actuality, or at least should be, a life sentence. Under § 53.1-151(B) in the Code of Virginia, "Any person sentenced to life imprisonment who escapes from a correctional facility or from any person in charge of his custody shall not be eligible for parole." Under the spirit of the law, Godfrey should not be released from prison.

It is clear the Parole Board cannot be trusted to follow the law, and their policies or procedures, much less keep the people of the Commonwealth safe. One again, I request immediate intervention and a moratorium on the release of other dangerous criminals until the Parole Board has been replaced and proper protocols can be followed. I intend to hold you and your administration responsible for these actions. As Governor, it is incumbent upon you to provide for the safety and security of Virginians. I call upon you to explain how letting these violent offenders out of prison is improving the safety of our citizens.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill DeSteph".

Bill DeSteph