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 over the release of another convicted killer 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 and their own policies and procedures, in the release of Vincent Martin. These actions alone give me cause to demand additional scrutiny of 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 highlight several facts in the "overwhelmingly brutal" murder of Mr. Albert H. Hamilton, Sr.: 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. Additionally, 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 sentence is in actuality, or at least should be, considered a life sentence. Under §53.1-151(B) 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, their policies or procedures, much less keep the people of the Commonwealth safe. One again, I call on you for immediate intervention and a moratorium on the parole 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.

Regards,

Bill DeSteph