



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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News release

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Petition drive to oppose parole for murderer Eric Nelson exceeds 2,300 signatures in first 10 days

KENOSHA – A petition drive urging the Wisconsin Parole Commission to deny release of a convicted murderer is off to a strong start, already greatly surpassing a signature goal that Kenosha County Executive Jim Kreuser announced last week.

As of today, nearly 2,400 people had signed the online petition to keep Eric S. Nelson behind bars.

On April 1, Kreuser set a goal of collecting 1,000 signatures by May 10. In fact, that goal was met the following day, on April 2.

Kreuser and Kenosha County District Attorney Michael Graveley have joined the family of Nelson murder victim Joseph Vite in strongly opposing the release of his killer, who was recently transferred to a minimum-security, pre-release facility near Green Bay.

Citing this issue as a public safety concern, Kreuser last week sent a letter to more than 250 elected officials in Kenosha, Brown and Outagamie counties, urging them to sign the petition in opposition of parole for Nelson.

“I feel strongly about this issue, as do District Attorney Graveley and the Vite family,” Kreuser said. “And I think it’s very important that we send a clear message to the Parole Commission, that Eric Nelson is a dangerous individual who doesn’t belong out of prison.

“I am grateful to everyone who has taken the time to study the issue and sign the petition, and I hope more join this fight in the coming weeks.”

Kreuser said his goal is now for 4,500 people to sign the petition by May 10. This deadline is timed around a parole hearing that Nelson is expected to have later next month.

The petition, which was established by the Vite family, is available for the public to sign online, at <http://bit.ly/NelsonParolePetition>. A weblog containing more information about Joseph Vite’s murder may be viewed at <https://keepamurdererbehindbars.home.blog/>.

Ed Vite, a brother of the late Joseph Vite's, said the family is encouraged by the support that the petition is receiving.

"This has been a hard process for all of us, since the day our brother was murdered," Vite said. "But it's gratifying for us to know that many other people share our belief that Eric Nelson belongs behind bars."

Nelson used a .308-caliber hunting rifle to shoot Joseph Vite in the head during an attack in Vite's Bristol home on Jan. 16, 1985. Nelson committed the crime alongside friend Daniel Dower, Vite's foster child, who had planned the murder for months. Both boys were 16 years old at the time.

After fleeing the scene in Vite's car with a cache of loaded rifles, they were arrested in Bridgeton, Mo., then returned to Kenosha County where they were tried as adults. Both were convicted of first-degree intentional homicide and were sentenced to life in prison, but were eligible for parole in 1999 under state law in effect at the time.

Graveley, speaking at a news conference last week, referred to Nelson as an individual who reveals his character as profoundly dangerous to the community.

"This is an individual we need to be protected from now as we did in 1985," the district attorney said. "I don't think there's any credible way to say a heinous act such as this is one that we can say, even with the passage of time, would not pose an unreasonable risk to the public. I am opposed to the release of Eric Nelson."

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