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Prince William County, VA

Prince William County Commonwealth's Attorney Amy Ashworth announces the following resolution of the case involving Justin Wolfe.

Earlier this year, this office was contacted by an attorney with the Virginia Attorney General's Office who had handled substantial appellate work on behalf of the Commonwealth of Virginia in this case. The attorney expressed concern that the federal courts might overturn Mr. Wolfe's convictions and either order a retrial or preclude the Commonwealth from prosecuting Wolfe further. That extraordinary remedy was under consideration after the federal court, for a second time, found that prosecutors under the prior administration had engaged in serious misconduct in connection with this case. The nature and extent of that misconduct are detailed in the federal courts' opinions, most recently issued in July 2025. At that point, the federal courts had given the Commonwealth an opportunity to try to resolve the matter.

In considering how to do that, this office undertook an extensive review of the evidence and the history of the case. That review included tens of thousands of pages of documents, including police reports, trial transcripts, evidence, and witness statements. We also spoke with members of Danny Petrole's family, including his parents and siblings; members of the Prince William County Police Department, now led by Chief Peter Newsham; Justin Wolfe's prior defense attorneys; the attorney for Owen Barber; prior investigators in the case; and one of the prosecutors from the Fairfax County team that conducted the retrial. We also engaged in extensive discussions with the defense attorneys who currently represent Justin Wolfe.

After that review and those discussions, the Commonwealth and the defense reached an agreement that provides for the following resolution of this case as follows:

Justin Wolfe's case was remanded to the Prince William County Circuit Court. He entered a guilty plea to the charge of Distribution of Marijuana and an Alford (no contest) plea to the charge of Criminal Solicitation. The Commonwealth agreed that he be sentenced to twenty-eight (28) years in prison with three (3) years suspended. The Judge accepted that agreement and imposed the sentence accordingly.

Nothing about this resolution changes the fundamental fact that Danny Petrole was murdered and can never be returned to his family and loved ones.

Danny was a young man who was beloved by many. He was also involved in a dangerous drug business, and his involvement in that business ultimately led to his death. The evidence clearly and undoubtedly establishes that Owen Barber, using a vehicle borrowed from a friend, followed Danny who had just delivered a large amount of marijuana to Justin Wolfe. When Danny arrived home, Owen Barber approached the vehicle, and using a gun he had obtained from his roommate, shot Danny who was seated in the driver's seat of his vehicle, nine times, killing him.

The evidence regarding Justin Wolfe's role in Danny's murder has always been more complicated. There is evidence that Wolfe may have advised or assisted Barber prior to the murder, depending upon which version of events is credited. At the same time, the evidence does not allow us at this time, given the numerous versions of events since 2001, to definitively establish beyond a reasonable doubt every aspect of what occurred between Wolfe and Barber.

We recognize that people will have strong and differing views about this resolution. Some will believe the evidence establishes Mr. Wolfe's guilt; others will believe it establishes his innocence. Those conclusions are understandable given the long and complicated history of this case. Our responsibility, however, was to review the evidence ourselves—carefully, independently, and with the benefit of the full record—and determine what resolution was appropriate in light of the current circumstances.

The tragic reality is that this case has produced suffering for everyone involved. Danny Petrole was murdered. Owen Barber received a plea agreement that, in retrospect, raises serious questions about the consideration he received in exchange for his testimony against Mr. Wolfe. And Justin Wolfe has spent 25 years incarcerated, including substantial time on death row and in solitary confinement.

The handling of this case has also been deeply troubling. Significant information was not disclosed during the first trial, and allegations of witness intimidation arose during the retrial. The result has been decades of litigation and uncertainty for everyone involved.

There are no winners here.

This was an extraordinarily difficult and challenging case. There is no such thing as a perfect trial. What we can strive for are fair proceedings and just outcomes, and that is what this office seeks every day.

In reaching this resolution, we considered not only the substantial legal and evidentiary issues presented by the case, but also the impact that another trial would have on Danny Petrole's family. We did not want to subject them to a third round of litigation in the trial court. We also had to consider the very real possibility that the federal courts could grant habeas relief and ultimately bar the Commonwealth from prosecuting Mr. Wolfe further.

After carefully weighing all of those considerations, we believe this resolution is a just and appropriate outcome under the circumstances. Most importantly, we hope it brings an end to decades of litigation and uncertainty and allows Danny Petrole's family, Justin Wolfe, and everyone affected by this case to finally move forward.

Danny Petrole's family has the following statement:

"Our family has lived with Danny's murder and the legal proceedings surrounding it for more than 25 years. Nothing that happens in a courtroom can bring Danny back or undo what was taken from our family.

We recognize the rationale underlying the Commonwealth's decision. We are grateful to the current Prince William County Commonwealth's Attorneys team for listening to our family, treating our concerns seriously, and working toward a resolution that we can accept.

For more than two decades, our family has fought to make sure Danny's voice was not lost in the legal proceedings surrounding his death. We have said what we needed to say and done what we believed we needed to do for Danny. We are now ready to let the legal process reach its conclusion.

We will always love and miss Danny, and we will carry his memory with us for the rest of our lives. We have only ever sought the truth and for those involved in Danny's death to accept accountability. Ultimately, judgment belongs to God, and we are ready to place what we cannot change in His hands.

Our hope is that, after 25 years, our family can finally begin to close this chapter and remember Danny for his life rather than for the circumstances of his death."

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Amy Ashworth is the elected Commonwealth's Attorney for Prince William County and the Cities of Manassas and Manassas Park. She was elected in November 2019 and reelected in 2023. The Commonwealth Attorney's Office can be reached from 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. every business day by phone at 703-792-6050 or email at cwooffice@pwcgov.org.

The victim's family has asked that they not be contacted for further statement.