

EDITORIAL: Gov. Brown should overturn Weidert's parole



Fresno County District Attorney Lisa A. Smittcamp is among those wanting to overturn the parole of David Weidert, who was convicted of murdering Mike Morganti, a developmentally disabled 20-year-old in 1980. Smittcamp wrote a letter to Gov. Jerry Brown expressing her views.

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It's difficult to imagine a more brutal murder than that of Mike Morganti, a developmentally disabled 20-year-old who was forced to dig his own grave in the Valley's foothills in 1980.

Morganti of Clovis was beaten with an aluminum bat, stabbed with a knife and strangled with telephone wire. Buried and left for dead, he remained alive — eventually dying of suffocation, a determination made after clumps of dirt were found in his lungs during the autopsy.

Wednesday morning, Morganti's family, Valley legislators and law-enforcement leaders, and advocates for crime victims and the developmentally disabled will hold a news conference on the north steps of the Capitol. All will urge Gov. Jerry Brown to overturn the parole of David Weidert, who was convicted of murdering Morganti.

We, too, ask that the governor keep Weidert in prison.

Yes, Weidert has stayed out of trouble while behind bars. Yes, he was 18 years old when he and an accomplice murdered Morganti. But this killing was premeditated and it involved torture lasting 45 minutes. During that time,

Weidert could have come to his senses, summoned an ounce of compassion and spared Morganti's life. He didn't.

What would drive someone to such unspeakable acts?

Weidert feared Morganti would testify against him in the burglary of a doctor's office. Both worked for a janitorial service that cleaned the office. According to trial testimony, when the doctor confronted Weidert about the burglary and told him that Morganti had witnessed it, Weidert said: "Listen, nobody is going to believe that idiot in court. Nobody's going to believe him. I'll see to it that they don't."

Morganti's murder is all the more tragic because Weidert was not yet 18 when he committed the burglary and was unlikely to spend time in jail.

Fresno County District Attorney Lisa A. Smittcamp is among those opposed to Weidert's parole, which was granted in January. Wrote Smittcamp to the governor Feb. 12:

"This inmate, who had no substance abuse issues, who had no issues of mental impairment, who had a job, a truck, an apartment, who had friends, who had a family, who did not kill out of jealousy or true emotional disability ... but who killed purely to permanently silence a witness to a simple burglary, should not be entitled to parole consideration using the passage of time as a major factor to his benefit."

Wrote Fresno County Sheriff Margaret Mims on March 20:

"Governor, I cannot imagine how someone so barbaric can be paroled Inmate Weidert has proven that he does not value human life and, as such, he should remain incarcerated for life."

When weighing the facts of the murder vs. the reasons for the parole board's granting of Weidert's freedom, Gov. Brown should give extra weight to Weidert's premeditation. And to the fact that when Morganti, buried in dirt, grabbed at Weidert's leg in a desperate attempt to live, his killer stabbed at him with a shovel before strangling him with telephone wire.

Anyone capable of that belongs only one place — prison.