

Stitt rescinds parole for Tulsa's notorious 'Crossbow Killer'

Andrea Eger Apr 29, 2022
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Gov. Kevin Stitt reversed course late Thursday, denying parole for Tulsa's notorious "Crossbow Killer."

Jimmie Dean Stohler, 69, was mere hours from being eligible for early release from a life sentence for the January 1982 murder of 30-year-old Michele Rae Powers in front of her Cherry Street apartment.

In a letter timestamped at 5:33 p.m., Stitt's general counsel Trevor Pemberton wrote the director of Oklahoma's Pardon and Parole Board that the governor had been provided by the Tulsa County district attorney "with material information regarding Jimmie D. Stohler that was not previously available to this office."

"Based on the new information, Jimmie D. Stohler's application for parole is being denied."

Stitt initially signed off on Stohler's parole certificate April 22 after the Pardon and Parole Board voted unanimously in March to recommend his early release.

But local prosecutors and Powers' nearest living relative who had vehemently opposed parole learned Stohler was scheduled to be let out as early as Friday morning when contacted by the Tulsa World on Tuesday evening.

After news of Stitt's reversal, Tulsa County DA Steve Kunzweiler revealed his office had made one last-ditch attempt on Thursday to stop Stohler's release by contacting Stitt's office.

"We gave them all the information they needed to understand," Kunzweiler said. "We reiterated to the governor what our position was with the Pardon and Parole Board — we protested it because it is one of Tulsa's most notorious and horrific murders. I'm gratified that the governor's office has seen fit not to grant him release."

Apparently, the Pardon and Parole Board's documentation indicated that another suspect in the case had been solicited "to do the killing for" Stohler.

But on Thursday, local prosecutors sent the governor's office a letter stating:

"The only evidence that suggests (the other suspect) is the actual killer is Mr. Stohler's (own) testimony. Objectively, Mr. Stohler is the person who had the motive, had been discussing it for a year, had purchased the crossbow and the poison tipped arrows, and fled the State for months after learning he was becoming a suspect."

Kunzweiler told the Tulsa World that getting the matter clarified in time would not have happened without the media company's reporting on the parole on Wednesday.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," he told the World Thursday evening.

Powers had been locked in a child custody dispute for several years with her ex-boyfriend and Stohler's best friend, Robert Doss.

Doss was a Tulsa police officer at the time and Stohler was a former officer who had left the Tulsa Police Department after a series of discipline-related suspensions and pay cuts.

Stohler reportedly admitted to police that he previously planned to kill Powers with a revolver or a knife.

Shortly after Powers scored a victory in the child custody case with Doss, she was ambushed by masked men in the parking lot of her apartment building while leaving for her overnight shift as a respiratory therapist at a nearby Tulsa hospital.

She languished in the hospital, dying six days after the attack, leaving behind her then 4-year-old son.

Doss was also charged with plotting the murder but was acquitted, and no one other than Stohler was ever convicted in the case.

Powers' twin sister, Rochelle Ruth, told the Tulsa World on Thursday evening that news of Stitt's about-face had her in a state of shock after she had been emotionally bracing for Stohler's release.

"I just can't even believe this. I am so thankful," Ruth said. "I don't know what type of retaliation he might have over this, but I'm just so thankful. It was a God thing. It really was."

Ruth, who lives in Henryetta, said she had been pleading with God for some kind of divine intervention.

"I looked up in the sky today and you know how you look for shapes? I seen this face up there. It was just like a face of a man with a beard — but I could see a crown on top. I just prayed: 'I pray that you can do something,'" Ruth said.

Then she added: "I am just almost in shock. I do feel like a big weight has been lifted off of me. You were the very first and you guys getting this out there made a big impact — and I think the political pressure was on Stitt."