



# Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

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May 13, 2022

John Tate  
Chair of the Parole Commission  
3099 East Washington Ave.  
Madison, WI 53704

Chairperson Tate:

Unlike the decision to *pardon* a person's prior criminal offense—a process that lies solely with me as Governor of this state—the decision to *parole* an individual actively serving an eligible sentence with the Department of Corrections lies solely with you as Chairperson of the Parole Commission.

It is my understanding that you recently approved the parole grant of Mr. Douglas Balsewicz, shy of his serving 25 years into an 80-year sentence for the murder of Ms. Johanna Balsewicz, his soon-to-be ex-wife. Johanna was in her home with her two young children when Douglas Balsewicz stabbed her more than 40 times. This case is disturbing and horrific, and the magnitude of this tragedy rippled through Johanna's family—the effects of which they endure still today.

In recent days, members of Johanna's immediate family have appealed to me directly, asking for a meeting with my staff and me. Today, I had the opportunity to speak directly with them and heard firsthand about the weight of the grief, trauma, and anxiety they carry every day. I also heard about their concerns throughout this recent parole process, including a lack of transparency, accountability, and notification, causing more trauma and pain for Johanna's family.

It is in light of this conversation that I write to you today. While I do not have the authority to overrule your decision in this case, I must implore you to reconsider.

I do not agree with this decision, and I have considerable concerns regarding whether Johanna's family was afforded sufficient opportunity to voice their memories, perspectives, and concerns before this decision was made. I have often spoken about forgiveness and the power of redemption—values I know Johanna's family and I both share. I also believe, however, and Wisconsin state law agrees, that the voices, experiences, and trauma of victims of crimes must weigh heavily in these conversations and deserve full and meaningful consideration. Justice simply demands it.

Our constitution states that victims have a right to be heard. Our statutes reiterate that victims have the right to provide direct input in the parole decision-making process. Section PAC 1.07(7) of the Wisconsin Administrative Code provides that you can rescind your decision where there has been a change in circumstances. I implore you to look again at this case and, importantly, to do so swiftly and without any delay.

I understand Douglas Balsewicz is to be released on or after May 17, 2022. Given this compressed timeline, I am requesting your immediate and expeditious reconsideration to determine whether this additional victim input changes your opinion as to whether release would depreciate the seriousness of this offense. Among the factors that must be considered is whether the questions raised regarding the appropriate level of victim notification and opportunity for input—especially given the extremely violent nature of the offense and relative recency—constitutes a change in circumstances justifying rescission at this time.

If Douglas Balsewicz goes free next week, the victim's family may be deprived of participating to the fullest extent justice requires. Johanna and Johanna's family deserve that opportunity, and I urge your immediate reconsideration to ensure that they do.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tony Evers". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Respectfully,".

Tony Evers  
Governor