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Convicted Murderer, Former Pro Skateboarder Mark Rogowski Granted Parole Despite Strong Opposition by the DA

DA to Appeal Decision to the Governor

San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan said today that at a hearing on Tuesday, despite strong opposition by her office, the State Board of Parole Hearings granted parole to Mark “Gator” Rogowski, 55, who was convicted of rape and murder in 1992. Rogowski has been serving a sentence of 31 years-to-life for the murder of Jessica Bergsten. The victim’s family members are devastated by the decision and DA Stephan said her office will appeal to the Governor to reverse Rogowski’s release.

Rogowski was a nationally known skateboard personality from Carlsbad who rose to prominence in the 1980s. On March 21, 1991, he raped and murdered 22-year-old Jessica Bergsten and transported her body to a remote desert area, where her skeletal remains were found several weeks later.

“The family and friends of Jessica Bergsten deserve the continued promise of justice in this case,” DA Summer Stephan said. “Our office argued strongly against releasing this violent defendant. We handle hundreds of parole hearings each year, fighting when it’s appropriate to make sure dangerous criminals are not released and crime victims are given a voice.”

At the time of the murder, Rogowski’s girlfriend had broken up with him. In addition, skateboarding was changing from ramps to the street. Rogowski did not think he could do well on street skating and saw his lucrative career coming to an end. Rogowski was upset that his relationship with his ex-girlfriend, Brandi McClain, was also coming to an end. Bergsten was Brandi’s best friend. Rogowski hit Bergsten on the head with The Club (a steering wheel locking device), raped her and suffocated her in a surfboard bag. He confessed to the crime several weeks later.

The District Attorney’s Office argued at the hearing that Rogowski remains an unreasonable risk of danger to society. Two of the victim’s family members attended the hearing and provided

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victim impact statement regarding the effects of the crime upon their family and the unsuitability of the inmate for parole.

In December 2019, a panel of parole hearing officers found that Rogowski was suitable for release, but Governor Newsom reversed the decision in April 2020. The grant of parole came on the third try for Rogowski. He is currently incarcerated at the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego.

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About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office

The San Diego County DA's Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.