

TRUMBULL COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

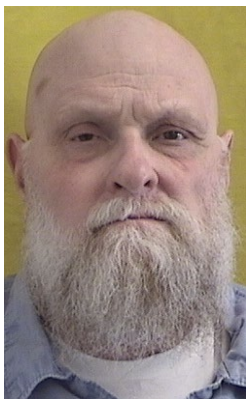
Dennis Watkins, Prosecutor

Repeat Violent Offenders newsletter

PAROLE UPDATE: JAN. 20, 2026

Parole board votes 5 to 3 to release Gary Betz

With three dissenting votes, the majority rules that Trumbull County convicted murderer to be paroled for fourth time in March 2026



On Jan. 15, 2026, the full Ohio Parole Board voted 5-3 to release convicted murderer Gary Allen Betz, who gained parole for a fourth time.

According to board chairwoman Lisa Hoying, Betz was found to be eligible for freedom because of his moderate risk score and his good behavioral record while in prison. Betz will be released from prison on March 16, Hoying stated.

Trumbull County Prosecutor Dennis Watkins, who tried Betz in 1977 and appeared in person for a third time to oppose Betz's parole, argued that Betz has demonstrated during previous paroles that his relatively clean prison record doesn't translate to his following the law while he is out of prison, and the cruelty shown to a helpless victim and the heinousness of the murder by shooting the victim in the face with a sawed-off shotgun at point-blank range justifies under the law a full life sentence to be served.

In his 11th letter to the Parole Board since 1989, Watkins described Betz as a "depraved heart" murderer and heinous offender, who has a pattern of undergoing "a most successful treatment rate while at the same time, a much higher subsequent failure rate" that Watkins has ever seen in a parole candidate since his first incident of assault in school at age 11.

Betz has been serving a 22-year-to life sentence for the Dec. 15, 1976, shotgun murder of Lake Milton tavern owner Ron Goche after Betz and a co-defendant had robbed Goche of the night's bar receipts (\$138). At the time, Betz had already been paroled twice after serving prison terms for breaking and entering convictions. In 2007, Betz again gained a full-board parole after his attorney stated he suffered from a serious medical condition. However,

that parole again was violated when Betz was arrested for drunk driving three times and referred to as “Super Drunk” by local police.

That medical condition was again brought up by defense attorney Emma A. Dann and in a report submitted by a second defense attorney, Zachuary Meranda, that stated that Betz is suffering from a severe skin malady that has confined him to a wheelchair and will prevent him from driving.

The parole board learned that Betz will be staying with a sister and brother-in-law, living near Kent, Ohio in Portage County, where he will be living near his counseling service. Records also showed that Betz has five different drug prescriptions, including Zoloff, to help with a depression, that according to his attorney Dann, is aggravated during the holidays.

Goche’s brother, Galen, also had time speaking before the board to oppose Betz’s parole, stating he felt that through the years that as a victim of crime, he has lost a lot of rights. Galen Goche, who had married two months prior to his brother’s death, said every time he has to travel to Columbus and fight Betz’s parole, he has to relive the tragedy. “I lost my best man,” Galen Goche told the parole board. “And I have been told the reason I have to go through this is because of the system. Well, you are the system – a big part of the system.”

Galen Goche also stated that in the past he had been able to meet face-to-face with one of the parole board members, but this time, he was not allowed to. Also, Goche’s wife was not allowed to speak during the hearing.

In conclusion, Prosecutor Watkins’ basic points were:

“ (1) There is substantial reason to believe inmate Betz will engage in further criminal conduct or that the inmate will not conform to such conditions of release as may be established under the rules of the Administrative Code and (2) there is substantial reason to believe that unique factors of the offense of conviction significantly outweigh the inmate’s rehabilitative efforts, and the release of the inmate into society would create undue risk to public safety and/or would not further the interest of justice nor be consistent with the welfare and security of society.”

Members of the public may submit comments about the parole of Gary A. Betz. Comments can be made through the ODRC website: <https://drc.ohio.gov/systems-and-services/1-parole/parole-board-hearing-input> For more information, contact Guy Vogrin, investigator / public information officer, Trumbull County Prosecutor’s Office, 330-675-2485.