

TRUMBULL COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Dennis Watkins, Prosecutor

Repeat Violent Offenders newsletter

Aug. 18, 2026

Watkins points to Pew poll about death penalty support, says local support stronger

Democrat Trumbull County prosecutor also asks both Ohio Republicans and Democrats to join other states to pass death penalty law for predatory rapists of very young children

According to a new Pew Research survey, about two-thirds of Americans (66%) now favor the death penalty for people convicted of murder, while nearly a third (32%) oppose it.

Pew Research, a non-partisan, non-profit research organization based in Washington, D.C., surveyed 3,554 U.S. adults on July 6-12, 2026, and found:

- 68 percent see the death penalty as morally justified for those committing murder, while just 28 percent see it as morally wrong.
- Some 39 percent say the death penalty is a deterrent for crime.
- Overall, support for the death penalty is 6 percentage points higher than it was five years ago, when 60 percent supported the death penalty in a similar April 2021 Pew Research survey.

Trumbull County Prosecutor Dennis Watkins duly notes that recent developments locally underscore the strong, popular support for the death penalty as well as for law enforcement, victims' rights and respect for the judgements of juries and judges in sentencing violent sexual predators and craven killers.

"First, our strong letter opposing the parole of monster child sex offender Felicia Beemer was covered by local media outlets and both the Tribune Chronicle and Vindicator newspapers, which sparked citizen comments showing overwhelming agreement that these violent offenders should serve life sentencing or even the death penalty. [\(See attached Beemer parole opposition letter\)](#)



Dennis Watkins addresses an Ohio Senate panel on death penalty during a Nov. 13, 2024, hearing.

“Secondly, on Aug. 11, the Tribune Chronicle wrote a compelling editorial supporting Beemer’s continued incarceration and calling her ‘a human version of ... debris’ and that ‘this disgusting, unrepentant and violent felon -- among the worst sex offenders Trumbull County has ever seen – (should be) imprisoned for the rest of her pathetic life.’ [“\(see attached Aug. 11 Tribune Chronicle editorial\)](#)

“Thirdly, recently this office also received support to have its First Assistant Prosecutor Christopher Becker and Assistant Prosecutor Michael Burnett, chief of the office’s Criminal Division, to initiate legislation to reinstate life imprisonment for habitual felons and to increase penalties for repeat drug offenders and non-stop thieves.” [\(See attached editorial “Orchid” by the Tribune Chronicle.\)](#)

Prosecutor Watkins, Ohio’s longest serving elected prosecuting attorney, also is asking the Republican Majority and the Democratic Minority in the Ohio Legislature to join other states that have passed new laws or have pending legislation to allow the death penalty to be considered by juries in the predatory criminal sexual assault of young children. Ohio’s long history shows both Democratic and Republican support in carrying out executions. (See attached Watkins letters dated Aug. 20, 2025, Feb. 12, 2025, and Dec. 10, 2024.) Nine states have taken action to date.

Ultimately, one or more of these states (or possibly federal lawmakers) will need to actively challenge the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2008 5-4 decision in Kennedy vs. Louisiana precedent that it is “cruel and unusual punishment” to execute criminals who rape babies and very young children.

Watkins also points to the fact the recent Pew poll shows 62 percent of Democrats support the death penalty. That support is even stronger in Trumbull County, Watkins states, as evidenced by the social media reaction to stories about the endless appeals of death row inmate Danny Lee Hill who has for almost 40 years has tried to avoid execution by various legal maneuvers, including a low-IQ defense while knowing right from wrong. On Monday, Aug. 17, Ohio’s 11th District Court of Appeals unanimously decided that Hill cannot continuously litigate the same low-IQ defense with more experts.

In fact, Watkins points to the latest social media reaction to the Aug. 5, 2026, story of a parole hearing for sex offender Beemer, who was convicted of having sex with both eight-month-old (female) and 18-month-old (male) family members in the early 2010s. In the reaction to defendant Beemer’s bid for parole, some residents on the WFMJ-TV website had such comments as:

- “So why didn’t she get the death penalty? Not that makes much of a difference!”
- “There’s a clear and easy solution to this”

- “Dispose of her and all pedophiles... PERIOD”
- “There is no forgiving for a rapist, especially a child or minor. The punishments handed out are not enough or non-existent!!”
- “Why is she still alive??”
- “Why is this even an option? Can the next headline be her death announcement?”
- In a separate post, one Facebook poster – commenting on the Beemer case – stated: “This monster should of got a death sentence 🤡idgaf .. there is no rehabilitation for such vile crimes 🤡🔪🔪!! I”



- Another responder to the Beemer parole story posted a gif video picture of a female Egyptian monarch running her fingers across her throat; while a third had posted a



picture of a cartoonish king character shouting “Off With Their Heads!”

Watkins -- who does not personally belong to any social media platform and recognizes that adding up comment totals does not necessarily translate into an accurate view of current opinion — notes, however, that there is a strong history of support in the United States’ recent history to reintroduce the death penalty for the worst-of-the-worst child rapists.

“It is possible (death penalty laws for child rapists), but first we must have more determination in Ohio to enforce present death penalty laws like other states are doing today,” Watkins said.

CASE IN POINT: Felicia Beemer is up for possible parole this month for raping two relatives age 8 months (female) and 18 months (male). She and her husband Cody Beemer raped both the infant and toddler and recorded these horrifying predatory acts on a cellphone. Felicia Beemer, age 36, was sentenced in Trumbull County Common Pleas Court on Nov. 2, 2012, to 15 years to life on convictions of two counts rape, three counts pandering sexual material with minor and two counts pandering obscenity involving minors.

The Trumbull County Prosecutor’s Office strongly opposes her parole and argues that she is a “monster sex offender and corrections nightmare” because she still is a clear and present danger while in prison by continuing to sexually and physically assault others

(85 documented disciplinary infractions) – **see attached Repeat Violent Offender newsletter and parole board letter dated Aug. 5, 2026)**

Further, Prosecutor Watkins states that across Ohio and the United States, there are numerous worst-of-the worst child sex offenders who are serving life sentences which were death penalty eligible crimes under the Constitution of the United States as written and used by our Founding Fathers. In fact, there have been no written changes or amendments to the Constitution which say anything contrary on the subject of capital punishment for such offenders. Instead, only majority decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court changed the criminal law of various states constitutionally permitting the use of the death penalty in child rape cases. The Supreme Court justices themselves decide what the “Evolving Standards of Decency” are for the states and federal government. In effect, they have overruled both state and federal legislative bodies that decided and put into legal effect what they viewed the “Standards of Decency” were in their respective jurisdictions.

Many citizens in Trumbull County (and across Ohio) are aware of different violent rapes of the very young where predators and pedophiles alike have been convicted by juries or pled guilty and are now serving life sentences in prison. For many years, it was lawful to execute criminals who raped women and children. It was permissible under our nation’s Constitution and laws and Ohio’s Constitution and statutes for decades. Ohio has upheld its death penalty law, which is in effect today, since our founding in 1803. Of course, the legislature in Ohio could abolish the death penalty or limit its use. But as a career prosecutor with an excellent staff of experienced trial attorneys, we know that a few craven child rapists have escaped the death penalty and are dangerous to the core.

For example – and excluding the Felicia and Cody Beemer cases previously discussed – in Ohio’s prison system today from Trumbull County, we have offenders who serially raped innocent children as young as 4 years old, one monster is serving life for live-streaming his rapes of a 6-year-old relative to an undercover police officer in Virginia; another vile offender serving life refused treatment for his young victim who was hospitalized and came close to death because of infections; and yet another Trumbull County child rapist serving a life sentence took a “selfie” on his phone with the audio-recording of the painful rape of a child asking him to stop.

In one of the most violent serial rape cases described above that I handled in 1987, involved a little 7-year-old girl weighing only 49 pounds who miraculously escaped death and still to this day fears the release of her Tier 3 sexual predator who is serving a life sentence. Thankfully, several different parole boards have not yet released this monster offender (through the years). In a letter my office sent to Ohio’s Parole Board in October 2015 opposing release on parole, in a relevant part, I said:

“... back in 2008, the United States Supreme Court by a 5-to-4 vote, outlawed the death penalty for child rapists who seriously injure but do not kill the child. The Louisiana

case involved the forcible rape of two girls, ages 5 and 8. Even President Obama said prior to the Supreme Court decision: ‘I think that the rape of a small child, 6 or 8 years old, is a heinous crime and if a state makes a decision that under narrow, limited, well-defined circumstances, the death penalty is at least potentially applicable, that does not violate our Constitution.’ With one vote the other way, the nation’s high court would have permitted under law the death penalty for child rapists. [For what was done] ... He is the poster person for the death penalty for child rapists. Though it is unlikely, the U.S. Supreme Court will reverse the decision...”

Well, today in the year 2026, it is in my view that it is time that the U.S. Supreme Court could do just that.

Here is what is happening in America now:

1. **Indiana:** Representative Andrew Ireland introduced House Bill 1312, which defines “aggravated child molesting” and permits the state to pursue either a death sentence or life imprisonment without parole.
2. **Missouri:** Representative Scott Cupps introduced legislation that would make first-degree child rape, attempted first-degree rape and certain severe child exploitation or trafficking offenses eligible for capital punishment.
3. **Illinois:** Senator Neil Anderson introduced a bill (SB 2.3.2) that proposes reinstating the death penalty in the state specifically for the predatory criminal sexual assault of a child, alongside specific homicide charges.

Also, the states that have already enacted similar laws:

4. **Florida** (Passed in 2023)
5. **Idaho** (Passed in 2025)
6. **Arkansas** (Passed in 2025)
7. **Oklahoma** (Passed in 2025)
8. **Alabama** (Passed in February 2026; effective Oct. 1, 2026)
9. **Mississippi** (Passed in early 2026)

Also, we have proposed Federal action:

Beyond the above-mentioned individual states, Representative Nancy Mace introduced the federal Death Penalty for Child Rapists Act, which would authorize capital punishment for aggravated sexual abuse of a minor under federal civilian law as well as under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

With action by Ohio’s legislature and others, we could move past a “pending” stage to actively challenge the U.S. Supreme Court’s Kennedy vs. Louisiana precedent.

Further, this prosecutor understands that it may be difficult to overturn the 5 to 4 vote precedent of Kennedy vs. Louisiana – decided in 2008 – however, when the cause is right, you don't stop fighting for justice even when some say it is the proverbial "impossible dream."

Miriam Fife is 86 years old and plans to attend Danny Lee Hill's execution in July of 2029. Many readers out there may understand this; doing your best is not about winning, it's about doing the right thing.

The correct side of this issue is best reflected by Justice Samuel Alito in his dissenting opinion in the Kennedy vs Louisiana case, which Chief Justice Roberts, Justices Scalia and Thomas joined. In relevant part, Alito wrote:

"A major theme of the Court's opinion is that permitting the death penalty in child-rape cases is not in the best interests of the victims of these crimes and society at large. In this vein, the Court suggest that it is more painful for child-rape victims to testify when the prosecution is seeking the death penalty. *Ante*, at 2662. The Court also argues that 'a State that punishes child rape by death may remove a strong incentive for the rapist not to kill the victim,' *ante*, at 2664, and may discourage the reporting of child rape, *ante*, at 2663-2664.

"These policy arguments, whatever their merits, are simply not pertinent to the question whether the death penalty is 'cruel and unusual' punishment. The Eighth Amendment protects the rights of an accused. It does not authorize this Court to strike down federal or state criminal laws on the grounds that they are not in the best interests of crime victims or the broader society. The Court's policy arguments concern matters that legislators should – and presumably do – take into account in deciding whether to enact a capital child-rape statute, but these arguments are irrelevant to the question that is before us in this case. Our cases have cautioned against using 'the aegis of the Cruel and Unusual Punishment Clause' to cut off the normal democratic processes."

Ohio must not cut off the "normal democratic processes" left to the states under the Constitution. The effort to use the United States Supreme Court majority to make the historic death penalty unconstitutional has failed. Just last week, on one day, this country saw three executions carried out. The last time that happened was in 2010, and Ohio was one of the states to carry out its law and executed a convicted murderer. Since when is it

wrong for a state to carry out the decisions of local juries and judges? In my opinion, in a participatory democracy, local people do it best!

In closing, as Ohio's longest serving elected Prosecuting Attorney (11th term in office) and as a conservative Democrat, I am asking Ohio's legislature's majority Republicans and minority Democrats to pass legislation expanding the death penalty statutes to include the heinous rapes of babies and young children. The creeping retreat from justice for all in our great state and country must be stopped! Doing the Right Thing is Never Partisan! And it is Never too late to turn around and take the right direction And Lead-the-Way!

Sincerely,

Dennis Watkins

Trumbull County Prosecuting Attorney

For more information, contact Guy M. Vogrin, investigator/public information officer with the Trumbull County Prosecutor's Office at 330-675-2485.