

supported by supporters

But his detractors remain intractable

BY KELLIE A. WAGNER
Law Tribune Staff Writer

Over the years, the state Department of Criminal Justice has had its share of eyebrow-raising events among the ranks of state's attorneys, but not one has ever been denied reappointment since the Criminal Justice Commission was created to appoint state prosecutors in 1984.

Some attorneys and judges are hoping

that Windham State's Attorney Mark Solak will be the first.

The CJC has received some 50 letters urging Solak's termination, and just as many letters have been sent to the commission in support of Solak. The latter are from victims and their families who praise the state's attorney's professionalism and concern.

The commission is scheduled to decide Solak's fate, as well as that of four other state's attorneys up for reappointment during a May 17 hearing in Chief State's

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DNA Excludes Murder Suspects



Peter Reilly, above, has suffered another setback in his quest to solve his mother's 1973 murder in Falls Village.

Tests on hair eliminate suspects named by Peter Reilly in his mother's murder

BY KELLIE A. WAGNER
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DNA tests requested by Peter Reilly on hair strands found in his murdered mother's hand 27 years ago appear to have excluded the two people Reilly suspected in the brutal, unsolved crime.

With that, Reilly attorney Hugh Keeffe said, "As far as I'm concerned, it's over." He said he sees no other direction to head in

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BY SCOTT BR VINCENT MICH

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State Police Confirm DNA Excludes Reilly Suspects

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with the case.

Major Timothy Palmbach, commanding officer for the state police division of scientific services, confirmed May 9 that DNA profiles of the two people Reilly thought may have killed his mother, Barbara Gibbons, came back negative.

"The bottom line is that it doesn't come to these two" possible suspects, Palmbach said of the results.

The outcome of the \$13,000 DNA tests, paid for by the state police, discouraged Keefe, of New Haven's Lynch, Traub, Keefe & Errante. Reilly and Keefe, along with New Britain attorney Tara Knight and Paul McQuillan, a New Britain attorney and former special prosecutor in the murder case, pushed police to perform the testing.

Neither Keefe nor Palmbach would disclose the names of the suspects excluded through the DNA profiles.

"This has been going on now for a couple years.... It has been on Peter's mind to close this gap out.... to bring the circle around," Keefe said. "The issue now is whether it is possible to convict anybody this far down the line."

Palmbach said that, of the four strands of

hair tested, two came back excluding the two suspects. The third, which produced only partial results due to its decomposition, also pointed to exclusion. A fourth hair produced no results, again due to the age of the evidence.

State police Sgt. Paul Vance confirmed that the Gibbons case remained open and that members of the Western District Crime Unit in Litchfield were now in charge of the case.

Palmbach said no other suspects besides the two Reilly indicated had been tested for a DNA match. He said that none of the hair strands had been tested against samples from Gibbons or Reilly. He added that his department, which had already been given a "deal" by the outside lab testing the hairs, would not pay for any further tests.

McQuillan stated that during the testimony given at Reilly's manslaughter trial, police experts said strands of Gibbons's and Reilly's hair were identified and found in her hands at the crime scene. Some other hair found was never identified, however, and was sent for the DNA testing.

Reilly was 18 years old in 1973 when he came home from a youth group meeting at the Torrington Methodist Church around 10 p.m. to find his mother's lifeless body in

a pool of blood on the floor. Her neck was slashed to the point of near decapitation. She had been sexually assaulted and, according to the autopsy, her thighbones were broken and her abdomen and back were stabbed after she had bled to death.

Authorities began questioning Reilly immediately upon being called to the scene. After an intense eight-hour grilling, Reilly implicated himself and signed a statement before being arrested by police. He was convicted of first-degree manslaughter and was sentenced to six to 16 years in prison for the murder of his mother. Reilly later recanted his statement to police and was eventually granted a new trial based on a grand jury investigation into police misconduct in the case.

In 1976, Judge Maurice Sponzo found that no crimes were committed by the police or prosecutors, but he harshly criticized the state's handling of the case. Prosecutors then declined to pursue the case against Reilly.

Doubt as to Reilly's involvement came from other sources as well, including a previous investigative report that hairs taken from Gibbons hands contained samples belonging to a blond Caucasian and not to Reilly or his mother. A secret list of five sus-

pects was given to state police to investigate.

According to a source close to the case, the suspects on the list included brothers Timothy and Michael Parmalee and Wayne Collier, all neighbors of Gibbons and Reilly. Timothy Parmalee was sentenced in 1980 to one year in jail, suspended after six months, for lying to the grand jury about having ever stolen money or a wallet from Gibbons. He has a criminal history, including serving time for sexual assault. Another man named on the list of suspects, Frederick Bonhotel of New York, was also charged with lying to the grand jury. A fifth suspect on the state police list, Gary Fitzpatrick, later died, the source said.

The defense attorney, the late T.F. Gilroy Daly, also later raised questions about the identification of an additional fingerprint belonging to a young neighbor of Gibbons.

Keefe, who said despite the fact that state Public Safety Commissioner Arthur Spada apologized to Reilly last year over the way police treated him in 1973, there would always be people who thought Reilly killed his mother.

"There is a presumption of guilt once you get arrested...., you've just got to live with that," Keefe said. "Everyone who knows this case is convinced Peter got a raw deal." ■

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