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NEWS RELEASE

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Court Denies Early Release of Stephanie Roper's Murderer

LEONARDTOWN, MD (March 27, 2026) – St. Mary's County State's Attorney Jaymi Sterling announced today that a request for early release filed by Jerry Lee Beatty, 59, one of the men who kidnapped, raped, and murdered Stephanie Roper in 1982, has been denied.

State's Attorney Jaymi Sterling and Special Assistant State's Attorney Gavin Patashnick successfully argued against Beatty's release. Beatty was eligible to file the request pursuant to the Juvenile Restoration Act because he was 17 years old at the time of the offense.

In a written opinion, Judge Elizabeth Morris denied Beatty's request and rejected his claim to minimize his role in the crimes, stating in part:

This Court ... rejects Mr. Beatty's attempts to portray himself as a mere bystander who succumbed to the whims of an influential adult ... Mr. Beatty made the independent decision to chase and recapture [Stephanie] even after he knew of Mr. Jones's plan to murder her ... As a result, this Court finds that Mr. Beatty's role in Ms. Roper's kidnapping, rape, and murder is a direct result of his choices.

"Beatty was not a passive participant, but an active and willing perpetrator. The Court's decision is a powerful affirmation of justice for Stephanie Roper, her mother, Roberta Roper, and the rest of the family," said State's Attorney Jaymi Sterling. "For more than four decades, Roberta has carried the weight of this unimaginable loss with strength and dignity while zealously fighting to protect the rights of all crime victims. This ruling recognizes the gravity of what was taken from the Roper family and ensures it is not diminished."

Sterling further added, "I would like to extend a special thanks to my co-counsel Gavin Patashnick, who is highly regarded throughout the State as an expert in the emerging field of the Juvenile Restoration Act. His assistance was invaluable in our successful prosecution to keep the Defendant from an early release."

St. Mary's County State's Attorney Jaymi Sterling and Special Assistant State's Attorney Gavin Patashnick, Chief of the Special Victims Unit of the Cecil County State's Attorney's Office, represented the State on behalf of the citizens of St. Mary's County.

The Honorable Elizabeth S. Morris presided and issued the written opinion.

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