

## OAKLAND

# 'My son was murdered on Snapchat': 6 years later, mom still fights for justice



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### Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

- Denis Preka died after ingesting a lethal dose of MDMA and MDA provided by friends as a joke.
  - The Oakland County Prosecutor's Office dismissed the case, citing insufficient evidence after a judge ruled Snapchat evidence inadmissible.
  - Preka's mother, Linda Preka Thom, alleges prosecutorial misconduct and believes political donations influenced the case's dismissal.
  - The Michigan Attorney General's Office is currently reinvestigating the case.
  - Thom remains determined to seek justice for her son, drawing strength from the disturbing Snapchat videos that documented his final hours.
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It's been six years since she lost her son, yet Linda Preka Thom still wakes up every night haunted by the image of him dying on a hallway floor, surrounded by hecklers who laughed, dumped water on him, recorded video of him struggling to breathe, then posting it all on Snapchat.

Even his death.

He was poisoned. Her son's friends had tricked him into thinking they had given him Adderall to help him study, police said, when they actually had slipped him the dangerous party drug known as "Molly," apparently as a joke. Then, over four hours, as he slid into delirium and ultimately died, his friends taunted him with comments like "Keep your eyes straight, dammit" and forced coffee down his throat — all while a camera was rolling.

"I wake up every single night. All I see are the eyes of my son on the floor, looking at the camera. His eyes are terrified," Thom said through tears in a recent interview, noting she has watched the video too many times.

But it's that gut-wrenching video, she said, that keeps her going.

After years of sleepless nights, agonizing, crying, begging for answers, Thom still is fighting for justice for her son: 21-year-old Denis Preka, of Grosse Pointe Farms, who died one day shy of his 22nd birthday during what was supposed to be a study night at his friend's house in Novi on March 19, 2019. To date, no one has been held criminally responsible for his death — and it has pushed the grieving mother to her limits.

On Wednesday, which marks the sixth anniversary of her son's death, Thom filed a formal complaint with the Attorney Grievance Commission against Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald and Assistant Prosecutor Marc Keast. She alleges the prosecutors made ethical and legal missteps in dismissing the criminal charges against the man who allegedly fed her son the lethal drugs and livestreamed his suffering and death. This same man, Snapchat and police records show, was a convicted drug dealer who was out on probation the night he allegedly drugged Denis Preka, and laughed while the victim was in distress, telling him: "This is the best moment of your life, dammit."

The words make Thom's blood boil. She said she is angry and frustrated about a lot of things: like how a jury concluded this same man and his friend did something so bad, that it [awarded her family \\$75 million](#) last summer in a wrongful death lawsuit that used the same evidence prosecutors had. Yet, the prosecution dismissed the case, saying it did not have sufficient evidence. Thom, however, maintains they didn't care about her son's case.

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## **Attorney General's Office reinvestigating case — 'I'm not letting this go'**

The Oakland County Prosecutor's Office dismissed the case on Feb. 23, 2022, one day before the first big hearing in its historic case against James and Jennifer Crumbley, the now-convicted parents of the Oxford High School shooter. It was the preliminary exam, when the prosecution convinced the judge to send the Crumbleys to trial. That same day, after seeing the prosecutor on TV, Thom fired off an email.

"With all due respect to the families who lost their children in Oxford, my son's life is no less important," Thom wrote in an email to Keast. "Your office didn't want to fight for my son."

Thom, though, has renewed hope in her fight for justice as her son's case is now in the hands of Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel's Office, which took over the investigation last fall. She said she is hopeful that the AG's Office will soon announce criminal charges against three men who were at the Novi house the night her son died — the same men she sued in civil court, though one of the individuals was dismissed from that case.

"The Department of Attorney General is investigating this matter. That investigation remains ongoing," Danny Wimmer, press secretary to the AG's office, said in a statement to the Free Press. He declined further comment.

In a statement Tuesday, FBI spokesperson Jordan Hall said the following regarding Thom's complaints about the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office: "As a matter of longstanding policy, the FBI does not confirm or deny the existence of any investigation. The FBI receives calls and online tips from concerned citizens on a daily and routine basis. Our policy is to intake all complaints from concerned citizens. The fact that the FBI may have received a complaint from a citizen is not indicative of whether or not the FBI has an open investigation."

Hall also encouraged anyone with information about a potential federal crime to go to [tips.fbi.gov](https://tips.fbi.gov), or call 800-CALL-FBI.

Thom, meanwhile, isn't letting up.

"Without finding justice for my son — no mother moves on," Thom said. "I'm outraged. I'm not letting this go."

## **Case unravels as Snapchat deemed unreliable; prosecutor accused of misconduct**

Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald inherited the Preka case in 2021, after beating longtime incumbent Jessica Cooper in the November 2020 election. By 2022, she would dismiss the charges after a judge concluded that the previous prosecutor had engaged in prosecutorial misconduct, declared the Snapchat evidence as unreliable, and prohibited it from being used as evidence in the case.

The judge did so after McDonald's office alleged that the former assistant prosecutor on the case engaged in misconduct by withholding evidence from the defense that involved a defendant's Snapchat account.

At issue was whether someone else could have been posting to Snapchat on the night Preka died, as the defense argued. The prosecution scoffed at that idea. So did a judge, who said "I don't think it's rational. I looked at every single one of these SNAPS."

The Snapchat account in question belongs to the man accused of giving Preka the drugs, then recording his suffering. His name is Nicholas "Nick" Remington, a University of Michigan student and convicted drug dealer who was charged in Preka's death with delivery of a controlled substance causing death, which carries a maximum life sentence. He was jailed on a \$1 million cash bond, though his lawyer would ultimately get his bond reduced to \$10,000, and the charges dropped.

Here's how it happened:

Defense attorney Neal Rockind argued early on that someone else — other than his client — could have used Remington's Snapchat account to post the troubling videos on social media the night Preka died. As he told the judge at a hearing, "all it would take is for someone to have access to the account and a password."

Coincidentally, that exact scenario actually *did* happen the previous day, when someone accessed Remington's Snapchat account while he was in jail. Preka's father had been given a screenshot of what appeared to be someone else using that Snapchat account, and showed it after a hearing to the former assistant prosecutor, who told the father to turn it over to the police for further investigation, court records show. But the former assistant prosecutor did not disclose that to the defense, which more than a year later would trigger claims of prosecutorial misconduct.

## **Prosecutor: 'I fought tooth and nail to save that case'**

It was Keast, the new assistant prosecutor on the case, who made the misconduct claim, telling the judge that after inheriting the case and reviewing the police file, he had discovered evidence that the former assistant prosecutor did not give to the defense. Keast then provided that information to Rockind, the defense attorney, who, in turn, sought to have the case dismissed on prosecutorial misconduct grounds.

Oakland County Circuit Judge Victoria Valentine did not dismiss the case, but she concluded the former assistant prosecutor had engaged in misconduct, and consequently ruled the Snapchat evidence was unreliable and could not be used at trial.

Five days after the judge issued that ruling, Remington, who by then had been released on a \$10,000 bond, took to Snapchat, posting:

"New Court Order — Prosecutor hid evidence ... Took u long enough. Nice job tryna pin me. Dis case boutta get dismissed boyyyy!!!!!"

He was right. The new prosecution also agreed that the Snapchat evidence was unreliable, but went a step further than the judge, dismissing the case entirely.

"Our investigator's findings have caused this office to conclude that we do not have sufficient evidence to proceed, and thus must dismiss this case," Keast wrote in a Feb. 18, 2022, letter to Linda Preka Thom, the victim's mother. "We have determined the records received from Snapchat are not reliable ... That would leave witnesses testimony as the only remaining evidence."

According to court documents, the witnesses also were unreliable, uncooperative and kept changing their stories, which could have made for a difficult prosecution.

In closing his letter to Thom, Keast stated: "I am truly sorry to have to share this news with you."

In a recent interview with the Free Press, Keast defended his handling of the case.

"I fought tooth and nail to keep this case alive," Keast said, stressing his office "did everything by the book" when it inherited the Preka case from the previous prosecutor. He also said that he felt badly for the victim's parents, Linda and Jamie Thom.

"I reported to the court exactly what I found. I just represented the facts," Keast said, adding: "My heart breaks for Linda and Jamie. It absolutely breaks for them."

Rockind has not returned calls for comment.

## **Former prosecutor: 'I was crushed ... I was confident in the case'**

Thom doesn't buy any of it. She has spent years investigating her son's death and has amassed hundreds of pages of investigative reports that, she says, refute the prosecution's claims. She alleges that it's McDonald and Keast who engaged in wrongdoing — not the former assistant prosecutor — by pushing what Thom views as a bogus claim of misconduct.

She also took issue with Keast's claims that he fought for her son.

"He did fight tooth and nail — to get a murderer out of jail, and to dismiss this case," Thom said. "My son was never represented."

Keast, however, has argued that the former assistant prosecutor had access to two police reports involving Remington's Snapchat account being used by someone else. He also produced emails that were sent from a detective to the former assistant prosecutor, showing her the search warrant affidavits that were filed to learn more about who was using the Snapchat account. But, he said, she never turned any of that information over to the defense.

In an interview with the Free Press, that former Oakland County assistant prosecutor, Beth Hand, denied withholding evidence from the defense, saying: "It absolutely did not happen. I would never do that."

"My integrity is everything to me. It has been my entire career. The accusation that I would ever intentionally withhold evidence is absurd, it's absolutely absurd," Hand told the Free Press, adding: "I have no recollection of ever receiving a report."

Hand is referring to the police reports that Keast alleges she had but didn't turn over. This has been an ongoing controversy in the case, with the former assistant prosecutor and Thom maintaining no such police reports were ever provided to the prosecutor by the Novi police, and, that they were only provided to Keast in 2021 -

*after* Hand had left office. Moreover, they say, Keast argued to the court that Hand specifically withheld police reports - not the emails he cited between a detective and the prosecutor.

Hand, who is now the Mason County Prosecutor in western Michigan, said she was distraught when she learned the case was dismissed by the prosecution, and when Circuit Court Judge Valentine declared the Snapchat evidence as inadmissible.

"I was crushed. I was confident in the case that I had written, and I was confident in the evidence that I had in order to seek justice for Denis and his family," said Hand, arguing the defense arguments that got the charges dismissed had been made at the district court level, but the judge there did not consider them "to be a valid argument."

Hand struggled to talk about the Snapchat videos from that tragic night.

"They'll never leave me," Hand said through tears of the troubling images.

## **A night of studying ends in tragedy — 'Oh my God, oh my God'**

According to police records, court transcripts, and Snapchat reports and videos viewed by the Free Press, here are the events that unfolded on the eve of spring in 2019 when a University of Detroit Mercy college student, Preka, went over to his friend's house to study for an exam.

On March 18, 2019, Preka went to his friend Paul Wiedmaier's house in Novi, where he intended on spending the night and preparing for a test the next day. At about 10 p.m., Wiedmaier invited two friends over, including Nicholas Remington, a convicted drug dealer who was out on probation that night stemming from a previous drug crime.

At some point in the evening, while Preka was studying, he asked Wiedmaier for Adderall to help him study, but Wiedmaier said he didn't have any. Wiedmaier then



told the other two friends about Preka's request, and a plan was hatched to give him MDMA and Molly instead, as a joke to see how he would react.

According to witnesses, it was Remington who gave Preka the drug, also known as Ecstasy, over a period of several hours.

Preka first took a pill. His friends told him it was Ritalin because, they explained, they didn't have Adderall. About 11 p.m., Preka did a Google search on his computer for the "side effects of Ritalin" as he was beginning to lose control of his faculties, records show. What followed were hours of him struggling to focus, talk and breathe. His eyes were sunken and darkened. At one point, he was in a chair with his head thrown back, saying "Oh my God. Oh my God."

But the heckling continued, with one person telling him: "Keep your eyes straight, dammit. This is the best moment of your life."

This was one of multiple events that were livestreamed to a Snapchat account under the name "Hulkolas." That was Remington's Snapchat handle. Videos show someone pouring water on him and in his mouth. Another shows someone holding a coffee cup over his mouth.

One viewer was mortified by what she saw, and preserved the videos and gave them to the police.

Several Snapchat users also sent messages to the Hulkolas account asking what drugs he had given him. "Methylone, some Moll," the Hulkolas account responded.

The last Snapchat video posted came at 1:50 a.m., March 19, 2019. It showed Preka on the floor with someone throwing water at his face. The video included a filter "it's Watering Time!"

According to the medical examiner, Preka died from edema and congestion of the brain and lungs within minutes of that video being posted. Toxicology results

showed he had 80 times more than a fatal dose of Molly and MDMA in his system.

During his four hours of spiraling, no one called 911.

At 3:04 a.m., a college student who was at the house sent Remington, who had left the house by then, a private Snapchat message:

"WTF ... Come ... Just left me here ... Holy F----- sh ... You're the worst friend"

Remington responded at 9:14 a.m.: "Wake him up and give him water."

But by then, Preka already was dead.

His friends had found his body and called 911 at 9:11 a.m.

## **Friend: 'I don't know what he took. I didn't see what he took'**

Paul Wiedmaier, one of the two college students who was held civilly liable for Preka's death, maintains he is innocent of wrongdoing. He said he never saw his friend take any drugs, didn't see anyone give him anything, and had no idea that someone was posting live videos that night to Snapchat.

"Nick never told me, 'By the way, I'm posting videos,' ... He was doing it on his own volition " Wiedmaier told the Free Press in a Tuesday phone interview, referring to his co-defendant, Nicholas Remington, who also was held civilly liable in the wrongful death case. Remington also was the only one to be criminally charged.

Wiedmaier also said that he didn't know the extent of Preka's condition that night, saying he asked him whether he was OK and whether he needed him to take him to the hospital, but that Preka "indicated to me that he was OK."

"He was like, 'I'm fine. Are you fine?' ... I would have done the right thing if I had gotten the right information," Wiedmaier said, maintaining: "I don't know what he took. I didn't see what he took."

In hindsight, Wiedmaier said: “I wish I would have just called the hospital.”

According to police reports, Wiedmaier gave misleading statements to police when they first questioned him about the incident. He explained why:

“I was scared at that point,” he said. “I didn’t want to get arrested for something I didn’t do.”

Wiedmaier, who lived in the house where the tragedy occurred, was not criminally charged.

Nick Remington could not be reached for comment. His mother declined comment. And his lawyer, Neal Rockind, did not return calls for comment.

## **Snapchats tell the story — 'U f---ing killed him'**

During their investigation, Novi police subpoenaed Snapchat and obtained numerous chats — or Snaps, as they are called — that were shared among users in the hours and days before and after Preka's death. Here are among several pieces of evidence that prosecutors had tried to use, and that the family still believes implicate Preka's friends in his death.

On March 19, 2019, a Snapchat user who saw the videos of Preka spiraling wrote a question: "U give that kid meth?"

The Hulkolas account responded: "Methylone, some mol"

The day after the tragedy, another student who was at the house all night and was there when Preka's body was found, texted a friend: "Dude he murdered someone ... Denise (misspelled) parents are rich and they will find out the truth one way or the other."

On March 29, 2019 — 10 days after the tragedy — this same student and the Hulkolas account started blaming each other in private Snapchat messages.

The Hulkolas account: "You have just as much responsibility as me. And u just throw some s--- on me like I did it when not nearly no one did nothing."

Friend: "But u killed him ... U f----- killed him ... And mol ... U gave him methyline. Giving him more when he was already f----d ... U r trying to blame me for any fallout of u f----- killing Denis."

For 52 District Court Judge Travis Reeds, that last message was especially compelling.

"I think that's the most clear SNAP that Mr. (Nicholas) Remington actually provided the drugs," Reeds said during a September 2019 hearing, when he concluded there was sufficient evidence to send the case to trial.

But that never happened.

**'She tossed this case under the rug ... Snapchat is unreliable? Seriously? ... Thank God I was able to see that video'**

After the prosecution dismissed the case, Thom became her own investigator and submitted a Freedom of Information Act, FOIA, request to the prosecutor's office for all its files in her son's case. She has since become a relentless warrior for her son, contacting law enforcement and government agencies of all sorts for help, including the Novi police, the AG's office, the FBI and legislators.

"She tossed this case under the rug," Thom said of McDonald, as she scoffed at the prosecutor's claims. "You're telling me Snapchat is unreliable? Seriously? ... My son was murdered on Snapchat."

Thom alleges that it was Keast and McDonald who engaged in misconduct by not disclosing information that they had before they dismissed the case — information that she said she learned about after filing a FOIA with the prosecutor's office. Specifically, Thom said she would learn that the person who was using Remington's

Snapchat account while Remington was in jail was his friend, who was at the house the night her son died and a witness in the case.

That friend, police reports show, had posted a cartoon on Remington's Snapchat account showing a cartoon of a man in a jail-style cage, and the following words: "To all 5,000 of you beautiful mother f----- I need Ketamine, who got? Thanks, Nick "

According to geolocation data obtained by Thom, that friend was using Remington's Snapchat account from his home in Northville, she said. Thom also said she obtained a USB file that contained live videos of the same friend using Remington's Snapchat account while Remington was in jail. She said she repeatedly asked the prosecutor's office to look into that for possible obstruction of justice charges, but that her requests fell on deaf ears.

Moreover, Thom said, this Snapchat post — which the prosecution held was favorable to the defense and should have been turned over — actually was inculpatory, or hurtful for the defense.

"The defendant obstructed justice and gave his best friend and eyewitness ... login credentials to his Snapchat account," Thom argues, stressing the prosecution "had this information. It could have been an obstruction of justice charge. But they never did anything."

## **Mom: Prosecutor motivated by political donations from defense lawyer**

In her fight for justice and in her formal complaint, Thom alleges that politics and money played a role in her son's case getting dismissed. Specifically, she alleges that McDonald directed Keast to show preferential treatment to Rockind — the defense attorney in her son's overdose case — because he and his wife donated nearly \$20,000 to McDonald's 2020 and 2024 political campaigns between 2020-24.

According to campaign finance records, Rockind donated \$11,150; his wife donated \$8,325.

To further her argument, Thom cites a 2020 Facebook post by McDonald in which she shows a video of former and current prosecutors supporting her candidacy, and thanks the 11 people in the video for their support, including defense attorney Rockind, who started his career as an assistant prosecutor in the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office.

McDonald has adamantly denied the allegation, calling it "outrageous."

"We can unequivocally state that campaign donations did not influence this case, or any other case, handled by the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office," Jeff Wattrick, a spokesperson for McDonald, said in a statement to the Free Press. "Like all elected officials ... McDonald has received campaign donations from numerous individuals, including many attorneys. "

The statement continues: "At no time has Prosecutor McDonald provided Neal Rockind or any of his clients with preferential treatment, nor has she used her office to benefit donors, friends, or special interests in any way. The Office of the Prosecuting Attorney is a sacred trust and a public service that Karen McDonald takes seriously."

Thom doesn't believe any of it. Her son died tragically, she said, arguing there's a plethora of evidence that shows he was drugged, killed and mocked by supposed friends who did nothing to help him when he was clearly in distress, struggling to breathe.

"I am broken to pieces," she said through tears. "It's been six years. I haven't heard his voice. He was the kindest human being."

But she refuses to give up. Instead, Thom remains steadfastly focused on that mind-numbing video that plays over and over in her head, and wakes her up every night

at 2 a.m. — near the reported time of her son's death.

"I know it's bad for my heart," Thom said of watching the video. "But I thank God that I was able to see that video. That was the fuel — and I am going to find justice, I have no doubt."

*Editor's note: This story has been updated with new details.*

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