

OAKLAND

'Shame on you': Mom slams AG for not reopening son's Snapchat death case



Tresa Baldas

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After seven years of fighting for justice, a grieving mother has been dealt another legal blow — this one from Attorney General Dana Nessel, who has refused to reopen the 2019 criminal case of the death of her son, even though she believes that foul play led to his death.

Denis Preka, a Grosse Pointe Farms college student, died one day shy of his 22nd birthday after friends allegedly slipped him a lethal dose of drugs, laughed at him as he slid into delirium over four hours, all while livestreaming his suffering and death on Snapchat.

Toxicology results showed he had 80 times more than a fatal dose of "Molly" (MDMA) in his system. During his ordeal, no one called 911.

"The Attorney General sympathizes with the Preka family and agrees with their belief that foul play led to Denis's untimely death. However, as we explained to Denis' family, we do not believe we can prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt..." Nessel spokesperson, Kimberly Bush, said in a statement to the Free Press on Friday, April 24. "We recognize the pain that his family carries and regret that this outcome does not make it any easier."

To date, no one has been held criminally liable for Preka's death. One man was initially charged and held on a \$1 million cash bond for two years. But the Oakland

County Prosecutor's Office dismissed the charges in 2022 on alleged prosecutorial misconduct grounds, and because a judge had ruled the Snapchat evidence was inadmissible.

Preka's mom, Linda Thom, has been reeling ever since. She alleged prosecutorial misconduct by Oakland County prosecutors and sought intervention from the AG's office, asking it to reopen the case.

After 18 months of waiting, she got an answer in an email that included the words, "We regret to inform you..."

But there was more.

"We have conflicting evidence on this issue. Those familiar with Denis and his behavior in his college social circle have advised that Denis was known to use MDMA on occasion," states the April 8 email obtained by the Free Press. "We presume that MDMA was present that night, but we do not know that it was directly given to your son without his consent. Nor do we know, in any definite sense, who provided the drug to Denis, if in fact it was provided to him."

'This is not justice ... shame on you'

All of this makes Thom's blood boil, especially given the police reports, Snapchat records, videos she has witnessed, and communications between her son's friends in the hours and days after his death. A jury also [awarded her family a \\$75 million verdict](#) in a 2024 wrongful death trial, concluding two men were civilly liable for her son's death.

Unlike a criminal trial, where a defendant has to be found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, the burden of proof in a civil proceeding only relies on a preponderance of evidence, meaning prosecutors only have to prove that something is more than likely true.

But Thom wants criminal liability, and accountability by prosecutors who she said she believes did her son wrong.

Preka, a University of Detroit Mercy student, died during what was supposed to be a night of studying at his friend's house in Novi.

According to police records, Preka had asked for a "study drug" to help him prepare for a test, but his friends allegedly slipped him MDMA and MDA instead — presumably as a joke. 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. He died around 2 a.m. Police were not notified until seven hours later.

[According to Snapchat and police records and video reviewed by the Free Press](#), here is a glimpse into what happened that night and the days following:

A Snapchat user who saw videos of Preka spiraling wrote a question to the person who was livestreaming the events: "U give that kid meth?" The person who posted the video responded: "Methylone, some mol"

One Snapchat user said she was mortified by what she saw — Preka lying on the floor, eyes rolling back in his head, water being dumped on him, coffee being shoved down his throat — preserved the video, and turned it over to police.

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."

On March 29, 2019 — 10 days after the tragedy — two friends who were there that night, started blaming each other in private Snapchat messages, with one telling the other: "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 methylone. Giving him more when he was already f----d ... U r trying to blame me for any fallout of u f----- killing Denis."

The man charged in the case, a University of Michigan student and convicted drug dealer, took to Snapchat days after learning the charges would be dropped, writing: "New Court Order — Prosecutor hid evidence ... Took u long enough. Nice job tryna pin me. Dis case boutta get dismissed boyyyyy!!!!!"

Thom has read these messages over and over again. She has also watched the mind-numbing video of her son struggling to breathe on the floor, his eyes rolling, and no one calling for help.

"This is not justice," Thom told the Free Press in a recent interview, during which she lambasted Nessel and her office for not reopening her son's case, and for "damaging my son's name" with claims that he took the drugs that night.

"That is harm — done to a young man who cannot defend himself, and to a mother who has already buried her child," Thom said, adding: "Instead of standing with victims, you turned against a grieving mother. Shame on you."

AGs office: 'Our deepest condolences ... We recognize your frustration'

In a statement to the Free Press, the AG's office explained that it has three reasons for not reopening the case: the Snapchat evidence was deemed inadmissible; no new evidence has been found to present to a judge or jury; and one of the victim's family members allegedly threatened witnesses.

According to the email sent to the victim's family, that relative was Preka's mom, who denies threatening anyone. Rather, Thom says, she recorded her conversation with this witness and turned that recording over to police herself to make sure he wasn't making contradictory statements.

In the April 8 email it sent to Thom, the AGs office acknowledged the mother's loss and frustration.

"At the outset we want to offer you our deepest condolences on the loss of your beloved son," the email states. "We recognize your expressed frustration at the speed of our review process, please know that we dedicated to our review the requisite time to perform a thorough assessment of this case due to both the severity of this matter and the loss of a precious life."

According to the email, the AGs office reviewed the actions of the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, the Novi police file, and the rulings of two judges involved in the case. It also said it conducted its own investigation. But in the end, it concluded it did not have enough evidence or legal grounds to prosecute the case.

AG: 'Nobody at the house that night will ... testify that Denis was given anything.'

"The reasons are two-fold," states the email, which explained the following:

First, a judge had previously suppressed the Snapchat evidence and declared it unreliable. And the deadline to appeal that ruling has long passed.

"Second, we were unable to locate new evidence that would enable us to prove beyond a reasonable doubt before a jury that a crime occurred and who committed the crime," the email states. "Delivery Causing Death is the only possible applicable charge, and it requires proof that one or more of the three suspects present at (the) house on the night in question knowingly and intentionally delivered (drugs) to Denis ... We have conflicting evidence on this issue."

Moreover, the AGs office added, nobody present at the house that night "will currently testify that Denis was given anything."

Still, the AG's office seems to indicate that something wasn't right about that night, based on the following statement:

"Please know we do not condone the actions of any person the night of your son's death," the AG email states. "Nevertheless ... There is simply no way to get around the evidentiary hurdles that we face, and our subsequent investigation did not develop any substantive independent evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt a crime occurred here. We are truly sorry we are unable to proceed."

Mom: 'I will not stop until there is accountability'

For Thom, the fight for justice is not over. She wants accountability more than anything, especially on the part of prosecutors who she said she believes were wrong in dismissing the criminal charges against the man she believes poisoned her son, and videotaped his suffering.

"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 in a previous interview with the Free Press.

A year ago, on the sixth anniversary of her son's death, Thom filed a formal complaint with the Michigan Attorney Grievance Commission against Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald and Assistant Prosecutor Mark Keast. She alleges they made ethical and legal missteps in dismissing the criminal charges in her son's case that were brought by a former prosecutor, and that politics and money played a role in that decision.

Specifically, Thom alleges that McDonald directed Keast to show preferential treatment to Neal Rockind — the defense attorney for the defendant charged in her son's death — because Rockind and his wife donated nearly \$20,000 to McDonald's 2020 and 2024 political campaigns.

McDonald has adamantly denied the allegation, calling it "outrageous." So has Keast. Rockind has not returned calls for comment on the matter.

Thom, meanwhile, continues to call for accountability.

As she stressed to the Free Press:

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

Contact Tresa Baldas: tbaldas@freepress.com