



Lawmakers urge Gov. McAuliffe to keep Jens Soering in state prison

By Alicia Petska alicia.petska@roanoke.com 981-3319 Dec 5, 2015



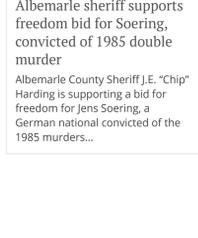
Jens Soering
Steve Helber | Associated Press



Eighteen state lawmakers, including a candidate for attorney general, are urging Gov. Terry McAuliffe to keep convicted murderer Jens Soering in a Virginia prison.

Soering is seeking permission to return to his native Germany. He maintains he's innocent in the brutal 1985 slaying of his then-girlfriend's parents, Derek and Nancy Haysom of Bedford County.

His campaign to return to his home country has attracted some high-profile support in Germany, including from members of parliament.



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In 2010, during his last days in office, Gov. Tim Kaine caused an uproar when he agreed to ask federal authorities to send Soering back to Germany.

The controversial move was opposed by the victims' family, Bedford County law enforcement and numerous state representatives on both sides of the aisle.

Incoming Gov. Bob McDonnell moved to revoke the request when he took office a week later. Soering renewed his petition in 2014 after McAuliffe was elected.

The governor's office said last month the petition is under review.

In a letter to McAuliffe, Del. Rob Bell and 17 other House Republicans said releasing Soering would "significantly undermine the integrity of Virginia's criminal justice system" and would affirm the worst suspicions about those with powerful connections being able to secure preferential treatment.

"Mr. Soering's murder of two innocent Virginians remains one of the most gruesome and gut-wrenching crimes in the last 30 years," read the letter dated Nov. 13.

"It would be a grave disservice to this community and the entire Commonwealth for Mr. Soering to be released."

Bell, who helped lead the charge against Soering's 2010 request, also referenced the case last Thursday while kicking off his campaign for attorney general.

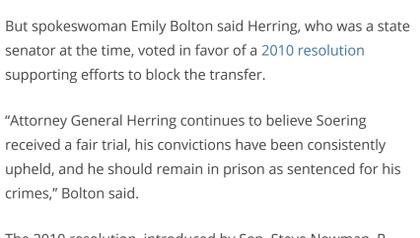
He faulted incumbent Attorney General Mark Herring, a Democrat, for being "conspicuously silent" on the issue.

"He's the top law enforcement officer in Virginia," Bell, R-Bedford County, said in an interview. "I would say it's extraordinary that he's not saying anything."

While the decision on Soering's petition rests with the governor, Bell said the attorney general could take the lead on speaking out against the request.

He also said the office should be researching what, if any, other legal options exist to block the petition should it advance to the federal level again.

He said he finds it troubling that McAuliffe is considering the request.



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"This should have been a five-second thing," Bell said. "McAuliffe could have simply said, 'No, of course not. Why would I ever release you?'"

Herring's office said the attorney general wields no authority in the matter. State law empowers the governor alone to make the final decision.

But spokeswoman Emily Bolton said Herring, who was a state senator at the time, voted in favor of a 2010 resolution supporting efforts to block the transfer.

"Attorney General Herring continues to believe Soering received a fair trial, his convictions have been consistently upheld, and he should remain in prison as sentenced for his crimes," Bolton said.

The 2010 resolution, introduced by Sen. Steve Newman, R-Bedford County, passed both the Senate and House unanimously.

Herring has already announced his intent to seek re-election in 2017. Bell is the first challenger to declare his candidacy. He's seeking the Republican nomination for office.

The viciousness of the 1985 murders roiled central Virginia. The victims were stabbed multiple times and nearly decapitated.

Soering and his former girlfriend, Elizabeth Haysom, both students at the University of Virginia, fled to Europe at one point. Soering, now 49, is serving a double life sentence in the Buckingham Correctional Center.

Haysom is serving a 90-year sentence for being an accessory to the attack. She testified against Soering at trial. He maintains he's innocent, and argues Haysom and possibly another unknown accomplice carried out the attack.

Since his conviction, he's written several books and become an advocate for prison reform.

Under the proposal Kaine agreed to in 2010, Soering would have been transferred to a German prison and been eligible for release there after two years.

McDonnell successfully revoked that approval. Federal authorities said a transfer wouldn't be considered without the state's "clear and unambiguous" consent.

McAuliffe's office said last month there is no timeline for reaching a decision on Soering's current request.

In addition to Bell, other signatories on the Nov. 13 letter to the governor included Dels. Kathy Byron of Bedford County, Ben Cline of Rockbridge County, Greg Habeeb of Salem and Terry Austin of Botetourt County.

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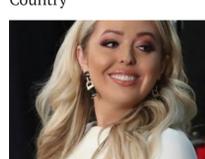
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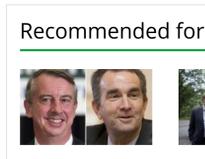
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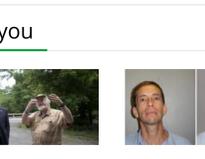
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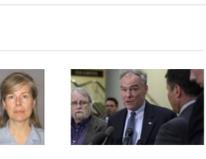
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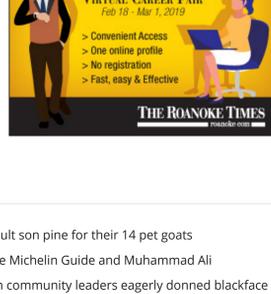
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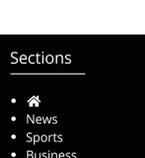


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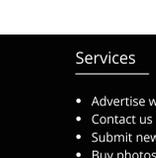
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