

## **Cop's kin push death penalty - Family of slain Detroit officer kicks off drive to get issue on state ballot in fall**

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Author: The Detroit News ; Norman Sinclair

LINCOLN PARK ? The family of slain Detroit Police Officer Matthew Bowens is determined to do what the Michigan Legislature failed to do last month ? reverse the state's 158-year ban on capital punishment.

In the first six hours of a petition drive Saturday to put the issue on the state's Nov. 2 ballot, nearly 600 voters signed petitions to do so. The Bowens family and supporters gathered in a Knights of Columbus hall in Lincoln Park and kicked off the first of five death penalty petition drives in the state to gather 317,000 valid voter signatures needed to put the issue on the ballot. The signatures must be collected before July 25.

The murders on Thursday in Detroit of five family members including four children gave even more impetus to many of those who stopped by to sign petitions and pick up stacks of blank sheets to solicit others.

"We've needed it (the death penalty) for a very long time and not just for killing law enforcement officers, but for things like that family that got murdered this week in Detroit," said James McBroom, a retired Ford employee.

McBroom said he has always supported capital punishment. The killings of Officers Bowens and Jennifer Fettig on Feb. 16 and the murders of a mother and her four children Thursday morning show how urgent it is to change the law, he said.

Bowens, 21, and Fettig, 26, were shot to death during an early morning traffic stop of motorist **Eric Marshall**, 23, of Detroit. Marshall is awaiting trial on first-degree murder charges and will be sentenced to prison for the rest of his life if convicted. Bowens and Fettig were the 18th and 19th Detroit officers killed in the line of duty since 1990.

Roger Thompson, 35, also faces life in prison if convicted of five counts of first-degree murder for the killings of his girlfriend, Lisa Shelton, and her four children, including his 9-year-old son.

Jason Bowens, a brother of the slain officer, said a similar drive was under way Saturday in Bridgeport in Saginaw County.

Another is scheduled today in Petoskey, the hometown of Fettig's family, while others will be staged Monday at the Fraternal Order of Police local office in Saginaw and at Eastern Michigan University on Wednesday. He said there are plans for more such drives around the state.

Bowens said the 55-52 vote by House members last month, which fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to move the matter to the Senate for a vote, robbed the people of a chance to weigh in on the issue.

"Something this important should be decided by the people and not by party-line votes," he said.

Bowens' father, James, said the petition drive is about more than adoption of the death penalty in the state.

"Whether you are for the death penalty or against it, you have a right to vote. We have people signing up because they want the right to vote on it," he said.

Like many of those who signed petitions, Esperanza Keck had a personal interest. Her husband and brother are police officers in River Rouge.

"I believe in the cause for police officers, definitely, or the guy in Detroit with the five murders but not for all murder cases," she said.

Michigan is one of 12 states that do not have the death penalty. The vote in the House on March 18 to amend the Michigan Constitution and allow the death penalty was the second since 1999. The measure would have gone to the voters if both the House and Senate approved it by a two-thirds vote.

As people filed in to sign petitions, the message on the large building sign at the curb read: "The Knights of Columbus does not support abortion or the death penalty."

Caption: Bob Stites of the Allen Park Police Department signs a petition to get the death penalty issue on the ballot. James Bowens, left, father of slain Detroit Police Officer Matthew Bowens, organized the drive in Lincoln Park. T-shirt sales benefit a memorial fund and the petition drive, which requires 317,000 signatures to get the issue on the ballot.

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