

Politicians upset dad of slain officer

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Rightly or wrongly, James Bowens feels betrayed.

Four weeks ago, the grief-stricken father of slain Detroit police officer Matthew Bowens told thousands of mourners that the best way to honor his son was to institute the death penalty in Michigan for the killing of local law enforcement officers.

At his son's funeral, he said he received a sympathetic hearing from politicians who shared his grief, embraced him and expressed their condolences in the Feb. 16 shooting deaths of Matthew Bowens, 21, and his partner, Jennifer Fettig, 26.

Bowens said he asked and received support from Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, Gov. Jennifer Granholm and U.S. Rep. Carolyn Cheeks-Kilpatrick, D-Detroit, in his call for a statewide ballot initiative to restore the death penalty in Michigan.

Bowens and his supporters are launching a petition drive to collect 317,000 signatures of registered voters by July 1 to place the measure on the Nov. 2 election ballot.

However, neither the mayor, the governor nor the representative is taking a public position in support of the initiative and that rankles Bowens.

"They just basically told me what I wanted to hear at the funeral, so I am not very happy with them," said Bowens, a retired railroad worker. "Don't tell me one thing and do another. I asked each of them, 'Do I have your support, and they each said 'yes.' "

Mayor Kilpatrick ? who gave Bowens a comforting hug after the funeral ? does not recall that conversation, said Howard Hughey, his press secretary.

"The mayor absolutely had no conversation about supporting the death penalty or supporting Mr. Bowens' effort," Hughey said. "The mayor is opposed to the death penalty. He thinks it's a pretty cruel thing to do."

Granholm did extend "an offer of a personal nature" to help the Bowens family, but never meant to give the impression that she would support the death penalty drive, spokeswoman Liz Boyd said.

"The governor remains opposed to the death penalty," Boyd said. "She believes the government should not be in the position of taking life because of the serious errors that have been made and the costs involved."

The outrage over the murder of the Detroit officers also has provided the impetus for a renewed state legislative effort to establish the death penalty as an option in all first-degree murder convictions. The maximum penalty now is life imprisonment.

The petition initiative and legislative proposal would require amending the state Constitution. Recent polls show that a majority of Michigan residents favor capital punishment.

The measure now before the House is sponsored by state Rep. Larry Julian, R-Lennon. The resolution needs two-thirds approval from House and Senate members to go on the November ballot.

Although she is not actively supporting the Bowens measure, Rep. Kilpatrick has moved away from her past iron-clad opposition to the death penalty, her press secretary, Denise Mixon, said.

"She's gone from a definite 'no' to a maybe on a case by case basis under special circumstances involving children and law enforcement," Mixon said.

"The representative is a federal official and this is something for the state to handle. She has not seen the Michigan legislation."

Eric Marshall, 23 of Detroit, has been charged in the deaths of Matthew Bowens and Fettig who were killed after a traffic stop in southwest Detroit.

While many Detroit police officers have expressed public support for the death penalty, Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings "is not commenting on the issue," said a police spokesperson.

"The chief won't take a position because she has to be politically correct and answer to the mayor," Bowens said.

"We do have widespread support. We expect to collect over 500,000 signatures. You won't find many police officers that are not for it."

Caption: Luther Keith Matthew Bowens Luther Keith

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Section: Front

Page: 02A

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