

Ruth calls for root and branch review of sentencing and release

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Ruth Davidson has today repeated her call for a root and branch review of sentencing and release in Scotland, after she raised the case of Michelle Stewart during First Minister's Questions today.

Michelle, 17, was murdered in cold blood in 2009. At the trial of her killer, John Wilson, the judge said that he should serve a minimum of 12 years behind bars.

Michelle's family were told last week – nine years on – that Wilson was now up for temporary release, which would allow him unescorted access to the community for periods of up to 8 days at a time.

The family say they feel let down by the justice system given the promises that were made at the time of sentencing.

The Scottish Conservatives are now calling on the new Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf to order a full review of sentencing, parole and home release policy.

In particular, the party wants to:

- introduce greater transparency and honesty around sentencing, so victims and their families are given clearer information at the time a trial takes place.
- reform Parole Board rules so victims can have a say, in person, on decisions as they are made.
- toughen up the rules on home release and parole, so that breach of licence conditions is deemed an automatic criminal offence

Speaking after First Minister's Questions, Ruth said:

"Michelle's family have had to experience the worst thing anyone can endure – the death of a daughter and sister.

"The least they should expect is justice for Michelle. Instead, they have been left feeling utterly betrayed by the justice system.

"When families are told by a judge that a murderer is given a life sentence with a minimum of 12 years behind bars, that's what they expect. They don't expect to receive a letter telling them the killer might be wandering the

streets in their village, unescorted, before that term has ended.

“We can’t carry on like this. The justice system needs to be overhauled with more honesty and transparency around sentencing. Victims and their families should have a louder voice in decisions on release. And criminals should know that if they breach their conditions of licence, they will be punished for that.

“The system is loaded against victims and their families. We have a new Justice Secretary in place. He must make this his first priority and act.”