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Richard Wershe Jr.'s longtime lawyer, Ralph Musilli, dies at 77

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The longtime attorney for notorious Detroit drug convict Richard Wershe Jr. has died.

Ralph Musilli, who was at Wershe's side for many years as the man known as "White Boy Rick" sought his freedom from a lengthy prison stay, died Tuesday, according to other supporters of Wershe and John F. Brennan, Musilli's partner at the St. Clair Shores firm Musilli Brennan Associates. He was 77.



Ralph Musilli, attorney representing Richard Wershe Jr., front, waits outside of the Michigan prison before Wershe's parole hearing June 8, 2017. *Oralandar Brand-Williams/The Detroit News*

Musilli's death comes less than a year after Wershe was released from his last prison sentence from a Florida correctional halfway house last summer.

"We've been in contact with Mr. Wershe," said Brennan. "(Wershe's release from prison) was a matter of justice. I think without Ralph's efforts, Mr. Wershe would continue to be incarcerated for actions and mistakes he made when he was young. His release was proper and warranted under the law."

Wershe, a former reputed FBI informant, spent more than three decades behind bars after being sentenced to life on a drug conviction in 1988 when he was 17.

Musilli told The News last year that Wershe's lengthy incarceration was an "inexcusable" and unusual punishment.

"His whole life has gone by, for God's sake," said Musilli, who first represented Wershe when he was 15. "That's inexcusable. It really is. He was not involved in any violence at all."

Vince Wade, a former Detroit TV investigative reporter who wrote the book "Prisoner of War: The Story of White Boy Rick and the War on Drugs," said Musilli was committed to getting justice for Wershe.



Richard Wershe Jr. will finish his sentence on Nov. 25, 2020. Florida Department Of Corrections

"Ralph worked hard for Rick Wershe, plugging away at his appeals when others would have given up. He never gave up on Rick," Wade said Wednesday. "His advocacy for Wershe — a drug case lifer — was fascinating considering Ralph's very conservative personal politics. Ralph was generous with his time when I was writing my book about Rick." "

Musilli, a resident of Utica, was a graduate of Detroit College of Law. His practiced defense, general law and appellate work, Brennan said.

"He literally did thousands of cases," Brennan said.

"He was truly a lawyer's lawyer and sought justice no matter how difficult no matter how hard," Brennan said. "He acted in the highest manner and sought to do the best he could for his clients. He is a professional that is going to be missed. ... Ralph was one of the exemplary ones."

Arrangements are pending, Brennan said.