

Justice for Dawn and FreeTonyViola.com Publish Detailed Timeline of Events in Dawn Pasela's Suspicious Death

The JusticeForDawn.com and FreeTonyViola.com investigative teams are publishing an updated timeline documenting the extraordinary events surrounding the suspicious death of whistleblower Dawn Pasela, who was found dead in her apartment as she was set to testify in open court about misconduct by her bosses, Prosecutors Dan Kasaris and Mark Bennett.

The timeline was originally assembled with the assistance of Uncovered.com, which highlighted Dawn's case, and has now been updated with important new evidence including

- A forensic pathologist has called for Dawn's death to be reinvestigated
- The FBI received a tip line that Dawn was murdered
- The United States Court of Appeals found the government unlawfully withheld records in Tony Viola's criminal case and concerning Dawn Pasela
- NBC News featured Dawn's case in its "Unsolved Ohio" series; and
- Retired Cuyahoga County Sheriff Detective John Morgan has publicly stated that Parma Police made "no attempt" to properly investigate Dawn's death.

BACKGROUND

Born in 1985, Dawn graduated at the top of her class at both Cleveland State and at Cuyahoga County Community College, where she was President and founder of Phi Theta Kapa, a member of the National Honor Society's Dean's List and an important participant in the Criminal Justice Club. One of Dawn's professors at Tri-C, Detective Arvin Clar, actively recruited Dawn for an open position in the Ohio Attorney General's Office. Once there, her superiors quickly recognized her intelligence, work ethic and computer skills. At the same time, the AG's office established a multi-jurisdictional mortgage fraud task force, consisting of a dozen federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. The AG's Office asked Dawn to interview for the position as Task Force Office Manager with Dan Kasaris, the head of Economic Crimes Prosecutions in Cuyahoga County. Kasaris was impressed with Dawn and, after consultations with federal prosecutor Mark Bennett, hired her. Dawn leapfrogged over older, more experienced employees to land a plum job at age 23 and quickly established herself as an indispensable part of the Task Force, logging evidence in hundreds of criminal cases, helping federal and state prosecutors prepare for trial and digitizing evidence for distribution to defense attorneys.

2008–2009 — Dawn Joins the Mortgage Fraud Task Force

In 2008, Dawn began working for the Ohio Attorney General's Office. Because of her computer and financial skills, she was recruited to become Office Manager of the Cuyahoga County Mortgage Fraud Task Force, beginning July 1, 2009.

The Task Force included local, state and federal law-enforcement agencies and prosecuted more than 1,000 defendants, including Cleveland businessman Anthony “Tony” Viola, who was indicted in both federal and state court starting in December 2008.

2009–2011 — Dawn Becomes Concerned About Evidence

According to Dawn's family, she began expressing concerns about what she was seeing inside the Task Force and told her mother that files were disappearing, that her signature had been forged when evidence was removed, and that government witness Kathryn Clover had been given access to files and evidence.

When prosecutors Bennett and Kasaris stated that computers seized in televised raids were “lost,” Dawn realized that those computers, in the possession of the prosecutors, were intentionally destroyed.

2009 — Dawn Is Sent Undercover to Record Viola's Defense Preparation

After Viola had been indicted, Dawn was directed to pose as a graduate student interested in criminal defense work and attend events involving Viola and his attorneys and supporters. Dawn was instructed to pretend to be a paralegal working with local defense attorneys and secretly record post-indictment conversations with Tony and his attorney so prosecutors could obtain confidential defense trial strategy information – a clear violation of the law. Dawn was also directed to write a check to Viola's legal defense fund, so prosecutors could determine where the defense fund bank account was located, who donated and which defense witnesses would testify at trial.

For years prosecutors claimed these recordings did not exist, and none were produced before either of Viola's trials. Later, former federal prosecutor Mark Bennett subsequently acknowledged that recordings were made and Task Force Chairman Don Cleland, many years after he retired, stated under oath that Dawn made voice recordings. Despite multiple court orders, the recordings themselves have never been produced, (see, for example, November 2016 order, case # 15-cv-242, WD Pa, Judge Susan Paradise Baxter)

April 2011 — Viola Is Convicted in Federal Court

After a six week trial, Viola was convicted in federal court of mortgage-fraud-related charges in April, 2011 and ultimately sentenced to 12½ years in prison.

2011 — Dawn Becomes a Whistleblower

After Viola's federal conviction, Dawn contacted him and disclosed what she had witnessed inside the Task Force, stating that prosecutors possessed evidence favorable to his defense that had not been produced. She subsequently provided FBI interview reports, lender records and internal spreadsheets that Viola believed contradicted central claims made by prosecutors. Those documents became critical because Viola was facing a second prosecution in Cuyahoga County involving many of the same underlying transactions.

June 2011 — Dawn Leaves Her Job

Dawn left her employment with prosecutors in June 2011 and later declined an invitation to return.

July 2011 – December 2011 – Dawn Secretly Meets with Tony Viola and Provides Key Evidence for use at the Second Trial

Dawn secretly meets with Viola and takes extraordinary steps to avoid detection, including leaving her cell phone at home and taking public transportation, and provides Viola with exonerating evidence for use at his second criminal trial. Dawn also revealed that Prosecutor Dan Kasaris was having a sexual relationship with government witness Kathryn Clover, a fact later confirmed in writing by Kasaris ex-wife Susan and other family members.

January 5, 2012 – Viola is sentenced to 12 ½ years in Federal Prison

At his federal sentencing hearing, Viola tells federal Judge Donald Nugent he is innocent and is sentenced to 150 months in prison.

March 21-22, 2012 — Dawn Is Subpoenaed

Viola subpoenaed Dawn to testify in his state criminal trial.

Her testimony potentially presented an extraordinary problem for prosecutors: a former member of their own Task Force was prepared to testify about hidden evidence and the government's undercover intrusion into Viola's defense preparation.

March 2012 — Dawn Reports Threats

According to records and statements subsequently assembled by Dawn's family and investigators, prosecutor Dan Kasaris demanded that Viola remove Dawn from his witness list and stated in writing in a series of emails that Dawn could face “indictment” and “prosecution” if she testified.

Dawn's family reported that Kasaris and investigator Arvin Clar also came to Dawn's apartment. Dawn became frightened enough that she temporarily left her apartment and stayed with her parents for approximately ten days.

Her parents later provided sworn statements concerning what Dawn told them about these events.

April 18, 2012 — Dawn Fails to Appear in Court

Dawn was scheduled to testify but did not appear so Judge Daniel Gaul issued a bench warrant intended to compel her appearance, which can be found on the case docket in Ohio v. Viola, 10-cr-536877.

April 23, 2012 — Dawn Tells Judge Daniel Gaul She Is Afraid

Dawn contacted Judge Gaul and explained that she was afraid to appear because she had been threatened with arrest and imprisonment if she testified. By then, the trial had progressed to closing arguments.

April 24, 2012 — Dawn's Parents Visit Her

Dawn's parents, Ed and Karen Pasela, visited their daughter. Concerned about the stress she was experiencing and her drinking, they disposed of the alcohol they found in her apartment.

This detail later became important because Dawn would soon be declared dead from acute alcohol intoxication.

April 25, 2012 — 4:39 AM: The Mysterious Phone Call

Records subsequently examined by investigators showed activity involving a silver Samsung flip phone. At 4:39 a.m. on April 25, an outgoing call was placed from the phone. Questions remain about who owned or possessed the phone, who was being called and why three cell phones were at the death scene.

Years later, Cuyahoga County Sheriff Detective John Morgan specifically recommended that investigators locate the missing phones, identify the owner associated with the relevant number and determine who Dawn attempted to call at 4:39 a.m.

April 25, 2012 — 5:44 PM: Dawn's Father Requests a Welfare Check

After Dawn stopped responding, her father went to her apartment. Unable to reach her, he requested a police welfare check.

Six Parma Police officers responded within two minutes, a possible indication that the police were “staking out” Dawn’s apartment so she could not leave for court to appear as a witness without being arrested.

April 25, 2012 — Approximately 6:15 PM: Dawn Is Found Dead

Police entered Dawn's apartment and found her dead. The condition of Dawn's body suggested that she had been dead for a substantial period before police arrived, and the scene was highly suspicious – window wide open, heat cranked up to accelerate body decomposition, computer missing and Dawn was fully clothed and cooking soup on her stove. Yet basic investigative steps normally expected in an unexplained death were not taken.

- Three cell phones inside the apartment were not collected.
- Potential witnesses were not interviewed.
- Police did not canvass the neighborhood or even nearby units in the apartment complex
- Available surveillance footage was not obtained.

April 25, 2012 — An “Overdose” Is Reported Before Toxicology Was Complete

According to trial transcripts, prosecutor Dan Kasaris informed Judge Gaul that Dawn had died from an “overdose” at 8 AM the next morning -- before the normal toxicology and investigative process had even been started.

Dawn's death was ultimately attributed to acute ethanol intoxication. The investigation effectively ended.

April 25, 2012 — Kasaris' Computer

Public records subsequently obtained by investigators also indicated that Kasaris destroyed his laptop computer on April 25 — the same date Dawn was found dead.

April 26, 2012 — Viola Is Acquitted

The next day, Viola was acquitted of every charge in his state mortgage-fraud trial. Viola remained imprisoned because his earlier federal conviction remained intact.

2012 – Present – Judge Donald Nugent Refuses to Allow Viola to Present Proof of his Innocence in Federal Court

Despite Viola's acquittal on identical charges and the suppression of exculpatory evidence by Prosecutors before his first trial, Hon Donald Nugent denied repeated requests by Viola and his attorneys to present evidence of his innocence in court, and also denied repeated requests to have Dawn's death properly investigated, USA v. Viola, 08-cr-506, ND Ohio.

2014–2020 — Dawn's Family Begins Helping Investigators; Federal Judge Donald Nugent denies repeated requests for a hearing

In 2014, Viola's investigative team, which continued pursuing leads despite his imprisonment, found obtained records from the Ohio Attorney General stating that Dawn never signed or was bound by any "confidentiality agreement" – despite Dan Kasaris claiming Dawn would be prosecuted for violating the agreement.

In 2014, Viola contacted Dawn's parents to thank them for their daughter's help. Ed and Karen Pasela eventually provided affidavits describing what Dawn had told them about misconduct inside the Task Force and the pressure and intimidation she experienced before her death. Meanwhile, Viola continued litigating to obtain records concerning the undercover operation and the evidence Dawn had attempted to expose.

2017 — Judge Daniel Gaul Expresses Concern

Judge Daniel Gaul, who presided over Viola's state trial and acquitted him through the jury verdict, later wrote Viola expressing regret over his continued federal incarceration and suggesting that newly elected Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael O'Malley's office might examine allegations of misconduct involving Kasaris.

2019–2022 — Government Records Produce New Questions

Litigation over government records continued until dramatic developments took place:

- The federal government admitted Kathryn Clover committed perjury at Tony's trial, 10-cr-75, ND Ohio
- Both the FBI and Justice Department admitted making materially false statements about evidence in Tony's case, 15-cv-242, WD Pa.
- Yale Law School began representing Tony in federal court
- Bennett was ultimately fired from the Justice Department and later disbarred.

Yet one central piece of evidence remained missing: and has yet to be produced: Dawn's recordings.

May, 2020 – After admissions that the government lied about evidence and the firing of Federal Prosecutor Mark Bennett, Tony is Released from Prison

Following the firing of federal prosecutor Mark Bennett and admissions that the government made false statements under oath about evidence, Tony was released from prison.

September, 2022 – Task Force Chairman Donald Cleland States Dawn Pasela wore a wire for prosecutors and possessed evidence in Tony's case

Retired Sheriff Detective Donald Cleland, who also chaired the Mortgage Fraud Task Force, provided a sworn affidavit stating that Dawn Pasela wore “a recording device” and recorded Tony's trial preparation, and “was permitted ... to take home with her a back-up hard drive” with evidence in Task Force cases on it.

Early 2023 — Detective John Morgan Reviews Dawn's Death

Attorney Kim Corral began representing Tony Viola and advocated, on a pro bono basis, for a new investigation into what happened to Dawn Pasela. She asked the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department to review the investigation and Detective John Morgan identified basic investigative steps that had never been completed.

On February 3, 2023, Morgan recommended locating the missing cell phones, determining ownership of a number connected to the investigation, and identifying the person Dawn apparently attempted to call at 4:39 a.m.

Despite those findings, the City of Parma refused to take any action or turn the file over to an independent agency.

2023 — Family and Supporters Take the Fight to Parma City Hall

Dawn's family, friends and supporters organized rallies at Parma City Hall on August 30 and November 1, demanding a new investigation.

Attorney Kimberly Kendall Corral joined the effort and called for an independent review of Dawn's death and has spoken publicly on multiple occasions about the need for accountability and a proper investigation into Dawn's death.

January 2024 – Fired Federal Prosecutor Mark Bennett Suspended from the Practice of Law

The Ohio Supreme Court issued an opinion in January, 2024 sanctioning former federal prosecutor Mark Bennett for “widespread” wrongdoing, including sexual assault, lying about the contents of his computer, his conditioning professional assistance to an intern on her willingness to provide sexual favors, making false statements to investigators and other wrongdoing, Disciplinary Counsel v. Bennett, Slip Opinion No. 2023-Ohio-4752.

April 2025 — Independent Pathologist Calls for Changing the cause of Dawn’s death to “undetermined” pending a new investigation

Forensic pathologist Dr. Peter Mazari conducted an independent review of the available records concerning Dawn's death. Dr. Mazari concluded that Dawn's death was “unnatural” and stated: “I would strongly suggest revision and reinvestigation.”

His full report and case opinion, posted at [www.JusticeForDawn.com/Evidence Locker](http://www.JusticeForDawn.com/EvidenceLocker), provided another independent reason to reopen the case.

June 2025 — FBI Tip Alleges “Foul Play”

Documents obtained from the FBI revealed an extraordinary tip received by the FBI's National Threat Operations Center that Dawn Pasela was murdered and that a person reported that a conversation involving former federal prosecutor Mark Bennett and/or Senior Assistant Ohio Attorney General Dan Kasaris concerning Dawn had been recorded after the discussion turned to alleged “foul play.”

The FBI has never investigated this tip.

September 2025 — Additional Witness Questions Surface

The FreeTonyViola.com Investigative Team has received numerous tips that Dawn made copies of evidence and provided it to friends, and reported questions concerning individuals who interacted with Dawn shortly before her death, including Jason Samide. In addition, discrepancies in statements provided to investigators by Dawn’s acquaintance Marty Maurer demand further inquiry – as Maurer told investigator Martin Yant that he was at Dawn’s apartment the night she died and that she was fine when he left, but Maurer later told retired FBI Agent Bob Friedrich he was never at Dawn’s apartment the night she died.

November 2025 — Federal Appeals Court Orders the FBI to Produce Additional Records

The United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit found numerous deficiencies involving searches or withholding of records connected to Viola's case and Dawn Pasela and remanded the matter for further proceedings. At the center of the records dispute remain the recordings Dawn made and other evidence connected to the Mortgage Fraud Task Force which has yet to be produced, Anthony L. Viola v. U.S. Department of Justice, et al., Case No 22-2186

2025 – 2026 – New Media Coverage of the Case

NBC News' "Unsolved Ohio" examined Dawn's death and her family's demand for a new investigation. NBC highlighted many of the same unanswered questions investigators had been raising for years: the phones that were not collected, the missing computer, witnesses who were not interviewed and the failure to pursue other basic investigative leads. Fox 8 Cleveland, Law360, Yahoo News and other media outlets also reported on the controversy.

March 2026 — Detective John Morgan Speaks Out

Retired Cuyahoga County Sheriff Detective John Morgan began speaking publicly about what he found. Morgan, an experienced investigator who reviewed Dawn's case file, stated that Parma Police made “no attempt” to properly investigate Dawn's death.

His criticism centered on fundamental police work that simply was not done: collecting the cell phones, interviewing witnesses, obtaining surveillance footage and investigating Dawn's missing computer.

This was no longer simply Dawn's family, Tony Viola or private investigators criticizing the original investigation, but a law-enforcement investigator who reviewed the file was now publicly saying the investigation had been mishandled.

March-May 2026 — Dawn's Family Returns to Parma City Council

Dawn's sister Christine Ditmore and other family members renewed their demands before Parma City Council. Tony Viola and Detective Morgan also addressed City Council and challenged statements made by Parma officials concerning the investigation.

March–June 2026 — Former Parma Police Chief Joseph Bobak Is Convicted

Former Parma Police Chief Joseph Bobak had communicated with Dan Kasaris concerning Dawn and had participated in an unrecorded meeting concerning issues connected to the case. In March 2026, Bobak was convicted in Parma Municipal Court in connection with destruction of police computer equipment, Case No. 26-CRB-00327.

FreeTonyViola.com subsequently obtained an internal Parma Police memorandum concerning a missing department computer hard drive, creating the obvious question: Did any destroyed or missing Parma Police computer equipment contain records concerning Dawn Pasela, Dan Kasaris or the investigation into Dawn's death?

August 2026 — 626 Pages of DOJ Records Surface

The search for government records produced another remarkable development.

According to August 2026 federal court filings, the Justice Department had previously represented that searches failed to locate certain records concerning misconduct by former federal prosecutor Mark Bennett, then 626 pages of records surfaced. Those records raise additional questions concerning Bennett, the undercover operation involving Dawn, missing electronic evidence and the recordings Dawn was instructed to make.

October, 2026 – Active Investigations, Ongoing Court Cases

As of October, 2026, multiple court cases seeking evidence and documents concerning Dawn Pasela remains open and ongoing, as does the investigation by private investigators.

Fourteen years after Dawn's death, government records concerning the events surrounding her death are still being discovered.

#