

McAuliffe pardons Roanoke man who served 21 years in prison in 2 children's arson deaths

By Laurence Hammack The Roanoke Times | Posted: Tuesday, December 22, 2015 10:30 pm

ROANOKE — For the first time since 1987, when he was charged and later convicted of killing his two young children in a Roanoke house fire, Davey Reedy no longer has to say he is innocent.

The governor has said it for him.

Gov. Terry McAuliffe granted an absolute pardon to Reedy on Monday, nearly three decades after the then 32-year-old father began insisting that he was wrongly accused of setting fire to his home while his son and daughter slept inside. Reedy persisted in his pleas of innocence while incarcerated for 21 years, then continued them after he was released on parole in 2009.

“It is now clear that Davey Reedy’s convictions on two counts of first-degree murder and one count of arson are not supported by the forensic evidence relied upon,” McAuliffe wrote in the pardon, which clears Reedy of all wrongdoing.

Following a lengthy review that started in the governor’s office long before he was elected, McAuliffe concluded that the scientific methods used to conduct arson investigations at the time of Reedy’s trial are no longer reliable.

Virginia governors are usually reluctant to substitute their judgment for that of the courts, and an absolute pardon is granted only when they believe a severe injustice has occurred.

When his case went to trial in 1988, Reedy faced charges of capital murder. A jury convicted him of lesser charges, first-degree murder and arson, and recommended that he serve two life sentences plus 10 years in prison.

On the morning of Aug. 10, 1987, fire heavily damaged the Reedy home and Reedy’s two children — 4-year-old Tina Marie and 2-year-old Michael Edward Reedy — died of smoke inhalation. Reedy, who later said he tried to save the children but wound up severely burned himself, was charged about one month later with setting the fire.

Prosecutors argued that Reedy torched his house while the children slept, then jumped out of a window, for one of two reasons: either he bailed out of an intended murder-suicide, or he set the fire with the hope of rescuing his children and looking like a hero.