

# Man who raped teen girls is latest cleared for release as MSOP changes course

Convicted in 1980s, Dwight Walton would be the eighth offender to earn conditional release.

By [Chris Serres](#) Star Tribune

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A man convicted of raping two teenage girls in the 1980s, and who admitted to more than a dozen other female victims, has been approved for conditional release from the Minnesota Sex Offender Program (MSOP), the latest in a string of violent offenders deemed capable by state judges of living in the community.

Dwight Walton, 52, will be released to a halfway house in Minneapolis.

Walton was convicted in 1986 of raping a 13-year-old girl, whom he grabbed from behind and threatened to shoot if she made any noise. The next day, Walton sexually assaulted a 19-year-old girl using a knife, threatening to stab her if she did not cooperate. After serving prison time for those offenses, he broke into a woman's apartment, then fled the scene after she awoke and screamed, according to court documents. Walton later admitted to sexually assaulting 15 adolescent and adult females, all of whom were unknown to him except one.

Because of his multiple violent offenses and stranger victims, Walton scored high on actuarial models that estimate the odds that a sex offender will reoffend, court records show. One recent test put him at a moderate-to-high risk for committing another sexual offense.

Even so, a panel of state judges last month approved Walton's petition for provisional discharge, ruling that he had shown significant progress in treatment and was capable of adjusting to society. The panel noted that Walton volunteers in the community, mentors other MSOP offenders, attends support groups and has visited family members in Minneapolis without incident. All four clinicians who reviewed Walton's case and offense history supported his petition for discharge.

Though Walton will be subject to a high degree of supervision, his discharge reflects a continued softening of attitudes among state officials toward detainees at MSOP, which faces federal court orders to demonstrate it runs a functional treatment program with a clear path toward release. The program confines about 725 rapists, child molesters and other offenders at secure treatment centers in Moose Lake and St. Paul.

A year ago, U.S. District Court Judge Donovan Frank in St. Paul declared the MSOP unconstitutional because it detains offenders indefinitely while depriving them of access to the courts and regular risk evaluations, among other legal safeguards. Though Frank's ruling is now under appeal, the state has been releasing offenders at an unprecedented clip. Since the start of 2014, courts have approved eight offenders for provisional discharge, compared with only two in the program's prior 20-year history. "Three years ago, [Walton] would never have gotten anywhere," said Warren Maas, president of the Minnesota Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. "The federal [court case] certainly has brought pressure on the entire MSOP bureaucracy to be less obstructive."

Walton is expected to be released to a 58-bed halfway house, at 2825 E. Lake Street in Minneapolis, operated by the Volunteers of America, a nonprofit. The facility, which has round-the-clock staff, specializes in helping prisoners restore community ties and obtain employment in the community. Under conditions of his discharge, Walton will be required to attend outpatient sex offender treatment and to look for work in the community.