



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor Rounds Grants Medical Commutation

(Pierre) – Governor Mike Rounds has commuted a state prison inmate’s sentence to parole supervision because of the inmate’s failing health. This marks the first time Rounds has reduced an inmate’s sentence since taking office.

David Watz, age 52, has been diagnosed with a potentially cancerous tumor in the brain lining near his right eye. A Sioux Falls ophthalmologist has recommended that Watz undergo extensive surgery soon or risk losing his eye. Watz is a veteran and is eligible for Veteran’s Affairs health care services.

Governor Rounds has stated that requests for clemency will be referred to the Board of Pardons and Paroles for their recommendation. In this case, however, because Watz is currently parole eligible, he cannot apply for a medical commutation through the Board. South Dakota Codified Law 24-2-15 does allow for the Governor to reduce the sentence of an inmate in failing health.

Watz was serving a three-year sentence for a fourth-offense drunk driving conviction from Brookings County. Clyde Calhoun, Brookings County States Attorney and Marty Stanwick, Brookings County Sheriff, were consulted on the commutation. Lake County Sheriff Roger Hartman was notified because Watz plans to live with a family member in Madison. Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead was also consulted since Watz had a previous federal conviction there. There were no victims requesting notification of Watz’s release.

The commutation does allow parole staff to coordinate Watz’ release with the necessary medical arrangements. If Watz does not follow the conditions of the commutation, he could be returned to prison. He will remain on parole supervision until February 18, 2005, the date he was scheduled to be discharged from state custody.