

Testimony of Debbie Florence
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
Monday, March 20, 2006

Good afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Debbie Florence and I am here today in support of Raised House Bill No. 5799 an "Act Concerning Crime Victims and the Victim Advocate."

I have a very strong interest in one of the proposals before you today. As many of you may remember, four years ago my daughter Jenny who was nine months pregnant was murdered by her ex-boyfriend Michael Latour. There were many problems with our Criminal Justice System during that time concerning the paper work process and warrants being served which lead up to my daughter's murder. I came to Hartford to testify in support of other Crime Victim's in our state and in support of the state's Office of the Victim Advocate.

A few months ago Michael Latour had an appeal heard at the Supreme Court. I was never informed of this hearing date, by anyone, nor was I notified that he had even filed an appeal. I would not of known at all if it had not have been for our state Victim Advocate, Jim Papillo. In October of 2005, on the day of the Supreme Court hearing, Jim phoned my house and left me a message saying he had just found out early that morning about the hearing and that he was on his way to the Supreme Court as he spoke. Jim did not know that I was unaware of this court date until I returned his call as soon as got home. I told Jim I did not know and was very upset because I was told after the trial I would be contacted if such a situation should arise. I would have wanted to attend the hearing and would have attended the hearing if I had known about it and feel, once again, that because I was not informed, my state constitutional rights were violated. Jim Papillo immediately took action on my behalf and contacted the States Attorney's Office to find out what went wrong.

It was in response to this situation that I later asked Jim Papillo if he would submit a bill that would help other crime victims in Connecticut so that there would be a law which would protect their rights so that what happened in my case would not happen to anyone else in the future.

After receiving a call from Jim Papillo, State's Attorney Patricia Froehlich called me to say that she did not find out about the appeal hearing date before hand either.

She told me that she would call the Chief State's Attorney's Office to inquire as to who was the Attorney representing the State at the hearing and that whoever it was would come to Danielson to the Court House to meet with me and apologize to me and my husband and also bring the video of the hearing so that we could view it and that any questions we might have would be answered. We weren't looking for an apology at that point, it was too late. We did, however, go to the Court House and meet with the attorney three months after the hearing date and watched the tape of the hearing and we were able to ask questions. It was helpful, of course, but I would have preferred being there at the time it occurred.

In short, I am very thankful that the state Victim Advocate was there for me and my husband in this situation. He and his office have done so much for crime victims in the State of Connecticut and for me. I thank this legislature also for creating such a vital office that helps so many individuals, victims of crime, as well as help make our Criminal Justice System much better by holding the system accountable to follow through on victims' rights.

For these reasons, I also strongly support each of the other sections of Raised House Bill No. 5799 that provide greater authority for the state Victim Advocate to do his job for crime victims and those sections that provide greater protections for crime victims and their rights.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,



Debbie Florence

Brooklyn, Connecticut