

Testimony of Debbie Florence
Submitted to Judiciary Committee
Wednesday, February 28, 2007

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 Bill No.7235, An Act Concerning Crime Victims and the Authority of the State Victim Advocate.

I would like to begin by saying that I think the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) has been doing a truly outstanding job in the State of Connecticut standing up for the rights of crime victims.

This agency, the agency that fights hard for victims' rights, needs to grow in size if they are to succeed in addressing the systemic problems still facing crime victims in our state. In addition the State Victim Advocate must be given the tools necessary to do the job they are assigned to do. The State Victim Advocate must be given subpoena power to adequately investigate complaints from crime victims. The State Victim Advocate must also have the clear authority to seek legal redress when victims' rights have been violated. Please, please, give the State Victim Advocate the tools he needs to better protect our rights.

As you all are aware, there are continuing systemic problems in our criminal justice system when it comes to honoring and respecting crime victims. Crime victims are not provided adequate information about their rights and how to assert their rights in criminal proceedings. This information is required to be provided crime victims under current law. Several of the proposals in this Bill further those rights and will help enforce the rights crime victims already have. I would like to address one proposal that has affected my case.

When a defendant is convicted and files an appeal, the crime victim should be notified of this and provided information about the appeal—what the issues are in the appeal; the date, time and place of the hearing on the appeal; and, finally, the outcome of the appeal. Crime victims maintain an interest in the case even after the offender has been convicted and sentenced. I'm sure you can understand this.

Just over a year ago this situation occurred in my case. The offender, who had murdered my daughter Jenny, filed an appeal of his conviction. I was never informed of this until it was too late. Jim Papillo called me the day of the hearing before the Connecticut Supreme Court to tell me that he had found out about the hearing that very morning from a court docket list posted on the Judicial Branch

website. Jim asked me if I was going to attend and when I told him I had not received notice he immediately took action in making phone calls to help me. After a short time, I received an invitation to view the proceedings on tape and a apology from the state's attorney also. I accepted the invitation to view the tape for my own information but the point is, once again my rights were violated like so many other crime victims in our State. I believe there has to be some accountability to help ensure that Connecticut's victim's rights laws are respected and carried out within our criminal justice system.

I strongly urge the committee to support the other proposals in the bill before you to better assist all crime victims in Connecticut. All of these proposals just make sense and I hope that you agree that they are worthy of your strong support.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debbie Florence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Debbie Florence