

I am submitting testimony concerning **Raised Bill No. 5485**. I have several suggestions concerning names, committee membership, and oversight.

There is confusion as we have Victim's Advocates at each court that personally work with victims through our confusing and slanted justice system. We have the Office of Victim Services which works with victims concerning monies that they may be eligible to receive for medical issues, time lost from work, travel and a variety of other costly issues. Then we have the State's Victim Advocate Office headed by Attorney Michelle Cruz. I think it makes most sense to re-name this office something that reveals what it is set up to do such as VICTIM'S RIGHTS OFFICE or the OFFICE FOR CRIME VICTIM'S RIGHTS or VICTIM'S RIGHTS OVERSIGHT AND SUPPORT OFFICE or something similar. This office provides broader oversight and a different view. It does and should spearhead efforts to improve victim's rights via legislation and help when necessary with filing motions when victim's rights are violated. I can tell you right now that the system is upside down with far more support for accused and convicted criminals than for victims and their families. Victims are in a position of weakness due to the trauma (physical, psychological, loss of income, loss of loved ones, loss of property, and loss of peace of mind) that has occurred and obviously each year some 180 victims are dead-they have been murdered. The trauma of dealing with our dysfunctional Judicial system is more than most victims and their families and friends can deal with and I have learned personally over the past 32 months that the accused have more money and laws available to them than is available to victims. No one in court has asked how I am dealing with stress and lack of sleep and loss of family and a life but those questions are repetitively asked for the accused. The Judicial system appears to do its best to re-traumatize victims at every turn. This office at the state level is critical to provide oversight of the big picture and suggest improvements to the system that create a more level playing field.

The make-up of the Office of the Victim Advocate advisory committee needs to be changed. Victims should play a major role. Believe me, until you are a victim you truly have no idea what the issues really are, no matter how empathetic or intelligent or compassionate you feel you are. Thus I feel that the majority of the committee should be made up of victims. I believe that several additional members can come from the judicial branch such as an assistant district attorney, a courthouse Victim Advocate, and several from outside agencies such as Survivors of Homicide and ACT-ALIVE. Thus the committee can have 7 victims, an assistant DA, a working or retired Victim's advocate, and 3 from outside agencies. This group would be able to review the performance or lacks thereof of the newly named VICTIM'S RIGHTS OFFICE and provide input that would help the office improve its performance and point the office in the direction that VICTIMS feel would be most helpful. I feel that these positions should be open to all victims of crime and that those interested in helping should apply and be appointed by the Governor for terms of 2 years, keeping the appointments separate from any ongoing legislative issues being discussed. I believe this office should be independent of other agencies within the Judicial or other branches and report directly to the legislature on an annual or bi-annual basis.

William A Petit, Jr. MD 03-19-10