

IMPACT STATEMENT

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I am writing this in regards to the Raised Bill 1035 – the act to repeal the death penalty in Connecticut. If I had the financial resources, I would be present at the actual hearing on March 8th, as this is a very important issue for me. I reside in Delaware, where the death penalty has been on hold since 2006. I am a victim of a violent crime, as well as homicide. My husband of 25 years, Anthony (Nino) Puglisi, was brutally murdered on April 20th, 1998 as I was gardening in the front yard. Donald Flagg, a crack cocaine addict, slipped into the back of our home, later confessing that he was looking for a woman to kidnap and rape. When my husband came home from work, he entered our home and was shot between the eyes. I did not hear the gunshot. When I entered our home, he bludgeoned me and dragged me to the basement where he raped me. At the time, I did not know that my husband's dead body was lying in our first floor Master Bedroom. He then placed me in the trunk of his car and drove me to his home, where I was bound and gagged for 101 hours until my escape. He raped me repeatedly. On the second day of my captivity, I overheard a news reporter announcing that my husband had been shot and killed....and that I was missing. Our twins, Melissa and Michael, were 19 years old at the time and away at college. Life changed forever that day. My children purchased two cemetery plots, not knowing where their Mother was.

I will not go into all of the gruesome details, however, it is important to say that my assailant was captured on April 24th. While I was bound and gagged in his home, he went to work at the Chrysler Plant in Newark, DE. When I was able to loosen my hogtie and shuffle to a phone, I called 911 that evening and saved myself. The police found me, by the grace of God, through 911 enhancement. I was taken to our local hospital where 42 physical injuries were documented, not to mention the emotional and psychological trauma. Law enforcement then went to Chrysler, where my husband's murderer was arrested as he worked on the line. He confessed. One year later, I attended the five week criminal trial. That is where I learned that offenders have more rights than victims. Of course, the defense was mental illness. I spent 101 hours

with this man. He told me he was a criminal and was proud that he (almost) committed the perfect crime. The police had no clues of where I was. I befriended this monster and saved myself. The Public Defender and a psychiatrist tried to convince the jury that my assailant "did not know right from wrong". I knew better. This is an evil man. I was able to testify, having gone through several months of cognitive behavioral therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. My daughter and several friends then testified during the Penalty Phase. I cannot even begin to describe the psychological trauma of bearing our souls, describing how Nino would not be present at any future family events. Our daughter, Melissa, painfully talked about how her Father would not be present for her college graduation and would be unable to walk her down the aisle. The jury then voted 7 to 5, in favor of life instead of death. I have had to accept their verdict, however, knowing that this man still lives and breathes is troubling to me. If anyone deserved the death penalty, Donald Flagg certainly did.

I have since reclaimed my life, authoring a book "Shattered: Reclaiming A Life Torn Apart By Violence" which details all of the emotions I felt during the crime, as well as my recovery period, preparation for the trial, the criminal trial and the aftermath. For the past ten years, I have become an Inspirational Speaker, lecturing to varied audiences of law enforcement, victim service providers, health professionals as well as victims. I am passionate about sharing my message, hoping to empower victims to become survivors. Victims are forgotten. I have found that most victims need to tell their stories and I am now the voice for my late husband, Nino, as his voice has been silenced forever.

I closely followed the heinous crime of Dr. Bill Petit and his family. When I heard that Connecticut was proposing to abolish the death penalty, I knew that I had to speak out. Pure evil has again ruined another family. I intently listened to this broken man when he was interviewed on national TV by Oprah a few months ago. Until one experiences evil, as both Dr. Petit and myself have, NO ONE can truly understand how we feel. Dr. Petit's wife and children are gone forever. My husband is gone, but there is another consideration that needs to be stressed. Victimization affects families for the rest of their lives. My relationship with my children will never be the same. Melissa and Michael lost their Father. Their grief is ongoing. It has become difficult for them to see their Mother change. I will never be the same person to

them. I have become devoted to victim advocacy, which they cannot understand. They have been able to go about their lives, however, suffer in other ways. When my daughter told me that she misses her Mother, it was like a knife going through my heart. I cannot be that person she knew before Donald Flagg victimized me and my husband. I spend hours upon hours writing to victims and serving on committees and boards in Delaware that assist victims of crime.

By abolishing the Death Penalty, a message will be sent to all criminals. "You can get away with ANYTHING." I have seen offenders sentenced to life without parole, only to have their sentences reduced. No one can convince me that my offender will serve all of his remaining years in prison. Where is the justice for the victims, survivors and families of heinous crimes?? As I travel across the nation, I meet hundreds of victims who approach me. Many tell me that justice was either not served, or that the punishment did not match the crime. Victims live in fear, unable to sleep at night, wondering if they will be re-victimized. I do not take this subject lightly. When there is no doubt that an intentional act of murder has been committed, especially in the case of Dr. Petit, there should be the option for a jury to consider death as punishment. I will never forget the night my offender turned on the television, forcing me to watch as the news came on. Not only was I considered a suspect in my husband's murder, but I learned that they had no clues of my whereabouts. My rapist laughed and said "I committed the perfect crime". He was thrilled. If I had not escaped, we all know that he would have killed me. His comments during my five days of captivity proved that.

In closing, I encourage you to consider the consequences of abolishing the death penalty. I am fighting this same cause in Delaware. I will admit that I did not believe in it before I became a victim of a violent crime. Coming close to death, and facing evil – eye to eye – changed me forever. Do I need to tell you what it feels like to have the man who murdered your husband rape you...over and over again??? Many of us were forced to join a club we did not sign up for. Having to fight for the rest of our lives, while watching the Nation protect the rights of murderers, is not fair. Please consider the victims and their families in your final decision. Victims need their voices heard. Criminals should lose their rights when they make that intentional decision to destroy another human life.

Thank you for allowing me to voice my opinion. I pray that my statement will help you come to the right decision.

Respectfully Yours,

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