

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is William A. Petit, Jr. and I appear as a private citizen to speak on behalf of raised **Senate Bill No. 1054 AN Act Concerning the Disclosure of Autopsy Reports.**

This is a bill that is significant to our constitution's commitment to protect the rights of crime victims. As you are well aware the Victims' Rights Amendment of the Connecticut Constitution states that victims (which includes surviving family members of murder victims) have "the right to be treated with fairness and respect throughout the criminal justice process" and also "(t)hat the general assembly shall provide by law for the enforcement" of these rights. Connecticut Constitution amend. Art. XXIX (b).

The loss of a child is perhaps the severest loss any parent can face. If that loss is due to homicide the loss and grieving are compounded by the very nature of our public judicial system, which is not at debate here. However once a child homicide case has been completed I am asking that you protect the victim's family's psychological well-being and grieving process by not allowing the public disclosure of the autopsy report to the public unless there is an over-riding legitimate legal reason for such a disclosure to be made. I know from personal experience that photos from public court hearings that are offered as full exhibits are publicly accessible within minutes and then can be seen worldwide on the internet. One would hope that the family members of a murdered victim would not have to face the specter of seeing medical reports about their murdered child show up on the internet, newspapers, magazines and elsewhere.

I believe as a matter of general practice the Chief Medical Examiner's office has done an excellent job over the years of refusing inappropriate requests and kept these records sealed after a child killer has been convicted and sentenced. But I fear that over time these requests will increase as has been seen in other states such as California and Pennsylvania.

The Victim Advocate Michelle Cruz has suggested some friendly amendment language to deal with specific situations, and I feel that these additions to the statute will help you further fulfill your fiduciary responsibility to protect the rights of crime victims under the Connecticut Constitution Article XXIX b and also provide support for the Chief Medical Examiner's Office in dealing with difficult legal situations. I believe these amendments would not undermine public oversight of the criminal justice system but importantly protect the dignity of child murder victims and their surviving family members.

A bill similar to this is now law in California (The Deceased Child Victims' Protection and Privacy Act). As one California legislator noted, "There is simply no convincing public interest in the broadcasting of lurid autopsy documents that should prevail over the rights of the family to keep private the final desperate moments of their child's life. These families who have endured such horrific tragedies shouldn't be victimized a second time by the public airing of these autopsy reports." Union Tribune Newspaper by Michael Gardner 9-4-2010. (Quoting Senator Dennis Hollingsworth of California)

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02-28-2011