

Statement in Support of SB 280  
Dawn Mancarella, daughter of a murder victim  
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My mother, Joyce Masury was murdered January 13, 1996. She was strangled to death in her home by a man she knew and trusted. Although I cannot possibly know how painful those final moments were for my mom, it was an odious deed inflicted on her and certainly the most heart wrenching, painful incident I've ever experienced. Fortunately for my family and me, the perpetrator was captured within a few days, and so I thought I would be able to begin healing. However, soon after, I was thrown into the lengthy proceedings of a broken legal system where I, as a victim family member, felt powerless, voiceless and ultimately unable to continue my process of healing.

Navigating CT's legal system was exasperating. Beyond the initial shock and pang of losing someone in such a monstrous way, there is the bureaucracy of the courtroom. My journey took nine months, which may not seem like a long time to many, but it felt like an eternity to me. Each month I'd return for an assigned hearing/court date just to hear the Public Defender ask for more time to build his case and then set up another date for the following month. It took all of two minutes each time he did this and when the final hour came – 9 months later – without a leg to stand on, I was told the accused and Public Defender wanted to plea bargain. I had no say in the matter.

Given that the justice system does not allow for victim family members to have the ultimate say about what happens with a case, the death penalty should be looked at with that in mind. How can laws best serve all victims? As long as we have capital punishment on the books, some cases will be deemed death worthy and others not. Large amounts of resources will be put towards a tiny number of cases where cold cases are ignored and crime prevention programs and services for victims are reduced. Victim family members who have no final say on whether a case is capital or not are stuck in a decades-long, never ending process if the case is deemed death worthy.

Although my experience with CT's legal system was frustrating and ultimately delayed my healing, I am tremendously grateful that my mom's case wasn't a capital one. I don't know how I would have coped if the proceedings had gone on for years or ended in a death sentence. The expectation of closure with such an outcome would have been elusive and quite possibly to the extreme contrary – forcing me back to the courtroom every few years for continual appeals to relive those horrific events that robbed my mother of her life and stole a chunk of my heart. I am in a much better place today because I didn't have to contend with the death penalty and in turn have had the time and energy to heal. That is not to say that the pain completely goes away, but it eases with time.

We can't take away all the heartache and anguish victims' family members are forced to endure when plunged into the unfathomable situation of a murdered loved one. WE CAN, however, urge YOU to get rid of the death penalty, as its cumbersome process only prolongs the pain and stalls healing. I believe time and energy would be better spent on refocusing resources on policies that are beneficial to the majority of victims.