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*State Victim Advocate*

Testimony of Natasha M. Pierre, Esq., State Victim Advocate  
Submitted to the Appropriations Committee  
Thursday, March 5, 2015

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, my name is Natasha Pierre and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

Governor's Bill No. 6824, *An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue*

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) receives many calls from the surviving family members of victims of homicide relating to the lack of investigation and/or arrest in their cases. To date, the OVA has at least a dozen cases that are classified as a "cold case", a very small fraction of the total number of cold cases in Connecticut.

Three years ago, the OVA supported the Division of Criminal Justice in obtaining funding for a Cold Case/Shooting Task Force Unit within the Division, and further, that the unit be established as a separate line item in the budget to ensure appropriate and continued funding. The Appropriations Committee agreed with this important initiative and did just that. Unfortunately, the Governor's budget, as proposed, recommends the total elimination of the unit as well as deeper cuts in personal services.

While it is necessary to evaluate the necessity and effectiveness of state-wide programs and make appropriate adjustments, the Cold Case/Shooting Task Force Unit has surpassed all expectations and enjoyed great success in its three years of full operation. To name a few:

1. Cold case homicide of Anthony Parker on April 6, 2011- Arrests made in February 2015;
2. Cold case homicide of Jaclyn Wirth on December 14, 2011- Arrest made in February 2015;
3. Cold case sexual assault/assault from April of 2009- Arrest made in January 2015;
4. Cold case kidnapping/sexual assault from August 4, 1988- Arrest made on December 6, 2013;
5. Unsolved homicide of Delano Gray on June 18, 2007- Arrest made on June 15, 2013; and

6. Home invasion/kidnapping/assault cold case from 2011- Arrest made September 2014.

These are only a sampling of cases that have been solved with the assistance and support of the Cold Case/Shooting Task Force Unit. While the OVA is cognizant of the financial challenges facing our state, it is counterproductive to eliminate a successful program that assists crime victims. This is especially true during this legislative session when several bipartisan proposals are pending, and by all indications will be passed, that would lead to the early release for a large number of criminal defendants.

The victims and/or surviving family members of these crimes have long awaited justice and without the Cold Case/Shooting Task Force Unit will likely continue to wait and risk the possibility of never obtaining justice. I strongly urge the Appropriations Committee to restore the funding of the Cold Case/Shooting Task Force Unit, as a separate line item within the Division of Criminal Justice.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

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State Victim Advocate