

This written testimony is respectfully submitted to the Michigan House Criminal Justice Committee - Meeting 3/19/24

NAME: Karen Jackson

REPRESENTING: Myself, my family and members of Voices of Murder Victims Facebook Group

BILL NUMBER(S): HB 4556-4560

POSITION: Oppose

TO: Madam Chair and all Members of the Michigan House Criminal Judiciary Committee,

As an individual whose life was forever altered by the brutal murder of my son in 2017 and as an advocate representing the Voices of Murder Victims Facebook Group, a community of families and friends who have also endured the incomprehensible pain of losing loved ones to murder, I am compelled to express my vehement opposition to House Bills 4556-4560. The proposed legislation in these bills endorsing the early release of convicted killers and other violent felons under the guise of resentencing, is a direct affront to the principles of justice and safety that underpin our community and legal system.

These bills, in essence, undermine the foundational laws of our state, such as Truth in Sentencing and the mandatory life imprisonment without parole (LWOP) for first-degree murder, by offering a backdoor for early release to those who have committed the most heinous of crimes. To contemplate the premature release of these individuals is to disregard the irreversible harm inflicted upon their innocent victims and the enduring agony of the families left behind. It is, in every sense, a betrayal of the trust placed in our legal system to protect the innocent and punish the guilty.

Moreover, the bill would appear to pose an unacceptable burden on our legal infrastructure, promising to inundate prosecutors, judges, and court staff with a flood of resentencing petitions. This deluge threatens to divert critical resources from current and future cases that demand attention, undermining the efficiency and efficacy of our justice system. The potential for rushed judgments and administrative oversights in the face of this pressure is a risk we cannot afford, endangering public safety and the very integrity of our legal proceedings.

The distinction made for mass shooting offenses, while recognizing the gravity of certain crimes, does nothing to recognize that the impact of a single life taken through premeditated murder is no less devastating than that of multiple lives lost in mass shootings.

Furthermore, reopening the trauma by taking away the justice given to innocent families if these bills are to be made retrospective is unconscionable.

By considering HB 4556-4560, this committee is on the brink of sending a clear message that the rights of convicted murderers are of greater concern than the lifelong suffering of their victims and the safety of our community. This is unconscionable and a gross misalignment with the values we hold dear.

I urge this committee to recognize that victims are the innocent here and to stand firmly on the side of justice, victim rights, and public safety by rejecting HB 4556-4560. To do otherwise would be to diminish the severity of these crimes and the pain of those left in their wake, while overwhelming our legal system to the detriment of its purpose.

Respectfully,

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