

Juvenile lifer law change adds to pain for victims

To those who support the proposed legislation that would abolish juvenile life without parole, you need to know the truth of what these bills would do.

The Bills STOP judges from handing down a sentence of life without parole to anyone under the age of 18 regardless of how serious or heinous the crime. They also allow a parole hearing after serving only 10 years.

The bills would be retroactive, so anyone younger than 18 at the time of their conviction serving a sentence of life without the possibility of parole after 10 years are granted a parole hearing and possibly set free.

What does that do?

It simply transfers a life sentence from the murderer to the victims who have lost a love one. Victims would be sentenced to a life of parole hearings, made to relive the most horrific and painful time in their life. Victims that were giving justice and hopefully some peace would now be thrown into a never-ending nightmare. The worst part, advocates supporting this legislation pay little regard to those MOST impacted, the victims who never see legislation, appeals, parole or a second chance given to their dead loved ones.

The National Organization of Victims Of Juvenile Lifers feels all victims should be notified prior to any change in legislation. And that's not by a parole hearing notice or meeting their loved one's killer at the local market.

Kary Moss of the American Civil Liberties Union, stated that "Michigan law dictates mandatory sentencing to life ... even for kids who were not the murderer but drove the getaway car. Life without parole is the harshest sentence available in Michigan for any crime, and we dole it out to children with no discussion about

maturity, culpability or judicial discretion."

First, ANYONE knows a 16-year-old would never want to be called or considered a child.

Second, they imply ALL young offenders get a mandatory life sentences. This is simply NOT true.

Yes, if through a court hearing the juvenile is found to have the maturity, culpability and judicial discretion of an adult, then life is mandatory.

Fact, In the case of my brother's murder, we sat through hearings to determine that the teenager could be tried as an adult, a culpability hearing and, once the verdict was given — guilty of first degree premeditated murder — they held another hearing to determine that the accused could be sentenced as an adult.

Three hearings and a trial is not a mandatory forced decision. Doctors, judges and lawyers evaluated the circumstances and made intelligent recommendations.

I admit, not all juveniles go through the same process.

A reasonable legislative change would be a mandatory determination hearing of ALL juveniles accused of a felony.

Last year these bills passed in the House but failed in the Senate.

The House is planning another hearing on May 6.

I urge anyone who does not want these bills passed to contact your state legislatures and me at no2ndchancesMI@aol.com or www.jlwopvictims.org.

Changes of this magnitude would greatly jeopardize the safety of everyone, not just the victim's family.

Jody Robinson of Davisburg is the co-founder of the National Organization of Victims of Juvenile Lifers.

GUEST OPINION



JODY ROBINSON