



News for Immediate Release

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Governor Corbett Signs Law Allowing Crime Victims' Testimony

Parole Board Can Hear Testimony Before Making Decision to Release Inmates

Harrisburg – Governor Tom Corbett today signed House Bill 492, amending the Crime Victims Act to allow victims, or their representatives, to testify in person before the state Parole Board before it decides whether to release an offender from prison.

"We have an obligation to honor the rights and sometimes the memories of the people who have suffered from crime," Corbett said. "That's why we needed this bill, to make sure that Pennsylvania leads the nation when it comes to acknowledging that just as criminals have rights, victims have them as well, and we are not trading one for the other."

Under Pennsylvania law, persons convicted of a crime who have served their minimum prison sentence may apply for parole every year.

This law allows victims, or their representatives, to testify before the state parole board, either in person or through electronic means, before the decision is made to release the inmate from prison. In the past, a victim could submit a written statement or speak to staff members who would submit a summary of the victim's comments.

"Victim input is an important consideration when making parole decisions," said Michael C. Potteiger, chairman of the Board of Probation and Parole. "We know it is a difficult process for them to go through, and this law will honor the victim's choice as to the best method for them to convey their feelings and wishes to the Board."

"On behalf of all crime victims, I am pleased to recognize this significant change to the law that further honors victim's rights," said Carol Lavery, Victim Advocate. "The new options enable registered victims, who so wish, to choose a more direct means to communicate their feelings, wishes, and requests to the parole board."

"Today brings healing and comfort to our crime victims across Pennsylvania," said Rep. Mike Vereb (R-Montgomery), who championed this law in honor of the late Ellen Gregory Robb, formerly of Upper Merion Township, Montgomery County, who was murdered by her husband, Rafael Robb.

"While this law does not bring back a mother to Olivia or a sister to Art and Gary, it certainly helps to ensure that Rafael Robb, and other threats to society like him, stay behind bars upon in-person testimony from crime victims and their families."

Robb pleaded guilty to killing his wife in 2006 and was sentenced to five-to-10-years in prison. He was scheduled to be released on Jan. 28, until the victim's brothers and others, including Vereb and Montgomery County Risa Ferman, pushed for the parole board to rescind its decision, which it did.

"A system that is truly just requires full consideration of the concerns and views of crime victims, or their survivors. This law is a good reminder that the hurt and sense of loss do not end with the sentencing of those who committed the crime," said Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne), who has been advocating for victims' rights.

"The remarkable persistence of Susan Hooper, the support of her family, and her well-reasoned argument have combined to make a difference for crime victims confronting the possibility of a perpetrator coming back to the community earlier than justice warrants," Baker added.

Hooper's brother, Robert Curley, of Luzerne County, was slowly poisoned to death by his wife, Joann Curley, in order to benefit from a \$300,000 life insurance policy. Mrs. Curley is serving a 10-to-20 year prison sentence for the crime and has been through the parole process five times.

Hooper has worked to improve victims' rights, including the input options to include in-person victim testimony before the parole board.

The law goes into effect on Sept. 1, 2013.

For more information, visit www.pa.gov.

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