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National Organization of Victims of Juvenile Lifers

**NOVJL**

[www.jlwopvictims.org](http://www.jlwopvictims.org)



For Immediate Release November 19, 2010

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## **Victims' Families and Prosecutors Denounce ACLU Suit in Michigan**

*Washington, D.C.* - A national coalition of prosecutors, legal experts, and victims' families today issued a stern denunciation regarding a lawsuit filed in Michigan by the ACLU against life sentences for murderers who were under 18 at the time of their extremely serious crimes.

The National District Attorneys' Association (NDAA) and the National Organization of Victims of Juvenile Lifers (NOVJL), representing also other victims' organizations, said today that the ACLU suit is flawed.

Jim Reams, NDAA President said, "The United States Supreme Court has said repeatedly that life without parole for murder cases where the offender is a teen is perfectly constitutional. In fact, they have recently relied on its constitutionality to make their rulings against the juvenile death penalty in *Simmons v Roper* in 2005. And they distinctly said in last year's *Graham v Florida* ruling that murder was different from non-murder cases."

ACLU publicity has included false statements such as saying that the USA is the only nation in the world that sentences juveniles to life. This is not true. At least 11 nations do so, including Australia and Israel. And many more nations do far more including juvenile executions, sexual slavery, and forced labor. Europe has longer juvenile sentences overall for crimes in general than does the United States. The life sentence for teen murderers in the United States is extremely rare, and the offenders have broad legal protections available to them to make their case for their age, culpability, and guilt or innocence. And the ACLU has exaggerated the number of JLWOP (juvenile life without parole) cases in the United States, claiming there are over 2500 when the actual number is less than 1500 nationally. Worst, they have publicly falsified facts of the crimes.

Charles Stimson, Senior Legal Fellow at the Heritage Foundation who authored the book *Adult Time for Adult Crime*, said of the over-reaching lawsuit, “The ACLU is expressing their policy preference under the guise of a heretofore undiscovered constitutional prohibition.”

Jennifer Bishop Jenkins of NOVJL, a national victims’ organization representing families of murder victims killed by teen offenders, said “Not only will this nuisance suit be profoundly harmful to victims’ families, but it will also be very costly to taxpayers and could potentially endanger the public. The ACLU advocates for these violent and dangerous offenders have overstepped this time. They have misled the public about the facts of these crimes, the law, and are indeed asking the courts to find a totally new right in the Constitution.”

Jennifer continued: “While I understand that no one likes to see young people capable of committing such horrible, horrible crimes – sadly they are, albeit rarely. Only a life sentence interrupted the budding serial killer career of the very culpable offender in our family’s triple murder case in Illinois. I am baffled why the ACLU is choosing to stand with murderers over victims and those working for public safety. They should be working to protect victims’ rights.”

“Even more painful and frustrating”, said Jody Robinson, Michigan spokesperson for NOVJL, “have been the ACLU’s irresponsible lies and factual omissions about the actual crimes themselves. One example in Michigan was our family’s case regarding offender Barbara Hernandez in which the ACLU published only the offender’s version of the story. Not surprisingly Hernandez lied about her own culpability in the horrific murder of my brother Jimmy Cotaling. The ACLU apparently never looked at the facts proven in court, or talked to law enforcement about what actually happened. Hernandez herself at her clemency hearing contradicted herself many times. Her story has changed repeatedly over the years. The ACLU’s refusal to our multiple requests to sit down and talk with victims’ families in this campaign of theirs on behalf of murderers is hurtful and shocking.”

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