

Illinois Victims

PRESS RELEASE from www.IllinoisVictims.org

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FAMILY MEMBERS OF MURDER VICTIMS KILLED BY “JUVENILE LIFERS” CITE FLAWS IN REPORT ADVOCATING FOR RELEASE FROM PRISON

Chicago, Illinois - Survivors of victims murdered by convicted killers under the age of 18 at the time of their crimes, tried as adults due to the heinous nature of the cases and justly sentenced to life without parole for their crimes, responded to today's release of the report *Categorically Less Culpable: Children Serving Life Without the Possibility of Parole Sentences in Illinois* from the Illinois Coalition for the Fair Sentencing of Children. They issued the following statement:

“The report confirms what police, prosecutors, witnesses, judges and jurors who worked on these cases already knew: nearly every person in Illinois sentenced as a juvenile to life without parole committed a heinous, multiple murder in which he (or, in one case, she) admits direct involvement.

“There are serious questions we have about how the report is written – from misinterpreted data to exaggerated claims to outright misstatements. The list of flaws in the study that we already found are detailed at the www.illinoisvictims.org website under ‘Juvenile LWOP’.

“Further, the report demonstrates that the typical and overwhelming number of Illinois inmates serving life without parole for murder committed as a juvenile are not very young persons who barely participated in the crimes. Rather, they are older adolescents directly involved in acts that bespeak heartless disregard for human life. The life sentence is rarely given to juvenile killers – only in cases of extreme aggravation that would, in many cases, qualify them for the death penalty if they were eighteen or older. And the report shows, almost without exception, that the killers profiled in the report more than meet the criteria established in Illinois law for determining the worst of the worst.

“Consider these examples: Evan Griffith, who used a hammer, scissors and knives to kill his victim, then killed again in prison while serving his life sentence. Peter Saunders, who raped and bludgeoned to death an elderly woman, then went on in prison to send death threats to federal judge Blanche Manning. Curtis Croft, who along with two others, gang-raped a girl, blindfolded her, laid her in an alley, ran over her body five times with a car, and finished her off with 40 stab wounds.

“Disturbingly, but probably not coincidentally, the report is timed to coincide with the introduction of legislation in the Illinois General Assembly which would offer all these offenders a chance at parole after a mere ten years of serving what was supposed to be a natural life sentence. Worst of

all, advocates for the bill HB 4384 have given no notice whatsoever to the hundreds of potentially affected victims' families, even though it would doom them to a lifetime of parole hearings which they were promised they would never have to endure. It simply transfers the life sentence from the guilty offender to the innocent victims.

“The report calls for victim notification only *after* the legislation that permanently changes their life situation would be passed – too late for them to have any input into the debate at all. We know that this is a violation of victims' rights as clearly articulated in the Illinois Constitution, not to mention a brutal act of cruelty towards families already devastated by murders of their loved ones.

“This callousness toward victims carries through the report. None of the time, significant money, and manpower lavished on the killers serving life without parole sentences, embodied in this report, was spent on a single victim of their crimes. As far as we can determine, not one victim's family member was interviewed for or even notified of the report. Our family only learned about it through a professional association with the Northwestern Law School.

“Partly for this reason, we object to their use of the deliberately provocative word ‘children’ to describe the young adults who committed the chillingly cruel murders of which they were convicted. Most of the one hundred and three JLWOP cases discussed in the report were seventeen year olds, some just weeks from their eighteenth birthdays.

“The real children in the report are the innocent victims of these killers. The five-year-old girl raped and flung from a fourteen-story window as she was crying out for her mother by Johnny Freeman was a child. The five small siblings who perished in an arson fire set by Daniel Henney and Dino Dicorpo were children. The twelve-year-old girl raped and murdered by Scott Darnell, who was on juvenile parole at the time, was a child. The unborn baby blown apart when David Biro fired a bullet into the pregnant belly of our beloved Nancy Bishop Langert, was a child.

“The inmates who so cruelly took their lives, by contrast, are not children. Illinois law defines them otherwise – as adults - and for good reason. They have been given full and exhaustive due process of law and demonstrated themselves to be calculating, dangerous, and pitiless. Society has a right to be safe from them.

“This report claims sympathy with the victims' families without ever having demonstrated such with their own methodology. The authors of the study could have included victims in the process but chose not to. And by advocating bringing back a tortuous parole process, long since done away with in Illinois, the authors of this report are urging that victims' families be subjected to repeated, never-ending engagement with these killers. If this is their only solution to concerns about a few of these cases, they render not credible their statements of sympathy for victims.”

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IllinoisVictims.org is a website-based victims' rights advocacy and watchdog organization that works to provide support, vital information, and resources to victims of violent crime in Illinois.