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STATE'S ATTORNEY

Date: February 1, 2024
Bill: SB 87
Position: Favorable

I distinctly remember my first encounter with grief. I was about 12 or 13 years old and a very dear friend of mine was killed coming home from soccer practice by a multiple time DUI offender who was driving drunk. He was sentenced to a mere 3 years of prison for extinguishing my friend's life, and erasing her potential from this world.

I remember, even at that age, asking my mom why her life wasn't worth more?

Now, more than twenty years later, I find myself on the other side of the horrific conversation.

I have the privilege of prosecuting some of Wicomico County's most violent offenses, including the motor vehicle fatal crashes. But the only time I have ever had a victim ask me why their loved one's life was not worth more was in relation to manslaughter by motor vehicle cases.

You see, these cases are a great equalizer. They show no prejudice in that you or your loved one may find yourself a victim regardless of your gender, race, creed, religion, or how "good of a life you live." And with Maryland law, as we sit today, you and your loved one's life is worth the equivalent of about 2 years.

As what happened in my last case shows, you or your loved one can be driving home in a perfectly illuminated vehicle, driving at the correct speed limit, coming home from work when you are struck from behind by someone driving 100 mph, by a person too thoughtless, careless and reckless to open the app on his phone to order himself an Uber.

The only way to protect the public, including yourself, myself, and our loved ones, is to reduce the number of drunk drivers on the road. The way we reduce the number of drunk drivers on the road is by deterrence.

A sentence that permits release on parole after two years is not deterrence.

We are at a crossroads, where now I am asking you – what is an innocent victim’s life worth?

If we are all honest with ourselves, two years simply is not enough.

By giving the courts more time to utilize at sentencing, you are also allowing the court to have more leeway for the important work of rehabilitation, to help ensure continued safety on our streets.

Public safety doesn’t sit solely on the shoulder of police officers, prosecutors, and judges. Today, this important question sits with you.

I am asking you, personally and on behalf of the Office of the State’s Attorney for Wicomico County, to please support enhanced penalties so that we can do the important work of making our streets safer, and so that the next time I have to sit across the table from an innocent victim’s family, I don’t have to answer the terrible question: why wasn’t their life worth more?

Thank you

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