



Continuing the Missions of the Stephanie Roper Committee and Foundation, Inc.

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Testimony of Roberta Roper in Opposition to Senate Bill 291- Criminal Procedure- Petition to Reduce a Sentence

January 30, 2025

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Judicial Proceeding Committee, for the opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 291. I am compelled to speak not only about my family's personal experience, but on behalf of the many survivors served by the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc. (MCVRC) for more than forty-two years. Some of you may know that MCVRC was originally founded by my husband and me as the Stephanie Roper Committee and Foundation, Inc. in tribute to the daughter who was brutally taken from us in 1982. Stephanie was kidnapped, tortured, raped, brutally murdered by two men who then began dismembering her body and setting it on fire. We, her family were shut out of the trial and silenced at sentencing. Those experiences nearly destroyed our family, challenging everything we valued, confidence in government, trust in people, faith in God. It shattered our community and left enduring wounds. Gratefully, things have changed since then. MCVRC has successfully advocated for the passage of more than 100 laws to provide victims with rights and services. Today, MCVRC is recognized as one of our nation's most distinguished and successful non-profits who support, advocate and represent the legal interest of crime victims and survivors.

I have spent the last four decades of my life advocating for victims' rights and services and being the voice for those who have been forever silenced. Bills like SB 291 are not only devastating scores of victims and survivors but are destroying public trust and confidence in the criminal justice system. SB 291 authorizes an individual who has served twenty years to petition a court for a reduction in sentence and allowing that petition to be repeated every three years. Both victims and citizens can correctly question where is the truth in sentencing? Today MCVRC attorneys represent an interest in justice for victims and survivors reminding the criminal justice system that victims and survivors, no less than their rapists and killers deserve compassion and some sense of finality.

One of our daughter's killers, having declined the right to a parole hearing, recently petitioned a court seeking release from prison. The Parole Commission, who has experts on their staff, is best equipped to review an offender's readiness for release. At that court hearing in December 2024, I was finally given the opportunity to exercise my right to present a victim impact statement after more than 42 years. Victims and survivors, having suffered devastating trauma, shouldn't have to endure endless re-victimization, and the cost of having to publicly dredge up their worst memories, to rip open their partially healed psychological wounds and to recount the human indignity and horrible memories that they must struggle with every day of their lives.

I respectfully ask you to restore confidence in our criminal justice system and not approve SB 291. The criminal system belongs to all of us. We must ensure that it serves all of us.