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On the unusually cold morning of October 7, 1986, I walked with my children to a local funeral home. We stood at the open casket of a 39 year old woman who had been stabbed 11 times and strangled twice because a young man wanted to see what was in her purse. This woman was my wife for almost 19 years. I leaned over the casket, held her face between my hands, kissed her forehead, and said goodbye. The lid was then closed, and I remembered the intense feelings of grief, fear, and anger piercing through my mind and body. But it wasn't until I looked at her casket sitting on top of the canvas straps that I realized that my wife was not the only victim of her homicide. I now had to be a father and a mother to my two teenage children. I had to learn to run a household and to depend on a lot of people I barely knew. I had to keep my family from losing their minds. My partner in business had been murdered, and that meant that my income would suffer.

The preliminary hearings, the trial, the sentencing, and the press were to be dealt with next. Having never been in a courtroom before, I knew very little about what was to take place. I learned very fast with a lot of research. Most people in my situation are not that lucky. My life had been turned into a nightmare, but I was fortunate because I was able to keep my sanity, raise my children, and put my life back into focus. I am a college graduate, I own my own house, I have my own business. I have never taken drugs nor have I ever been arrested. Yet, my wife was murdered in our own home with our own kitchen knives.

Anyone can be a victim. Murder has no boundaries, social or economic. Being a victim I realized why our system is called the "Criminal Justice" system. The criminal has rights, but what rights do the victims have? The goal of V.O.I.C.E. is to give our state a victims's justice system to parallel the criminal justice system. House Bill 2513 does 3 very important things toward our goal. It defines who a victim is. Most people in a homicide feel that the victim is dead, and therefore there is nothing more to do. The mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives, and husbands will all be covered under who is a victim. They are affected in a way I hope and pray you may never fully understand because to fully understand is to be a victim.

The second area our group is concerned with is information concerning services to victims. Information on the judicial processes. Information on what the victim can expect from the system and what the system expects from the victim. The key word here is "information". Most people are not lawyers or judges, and, for the most part, know very little about the criminal justice system. It is very upsetting to read the details of your loved one's murder in the morning newspaper as you lose your breakfast. It is disturbing to have to tell your children details of their mother's murder that are in the newspaper, and then try to explain why you didn't know before the press. "Why didn't you know first, Dad?" "Why, Dad?" "What happens next, Dad?" Now, for the first time in our family's history, I didn't have the answers. All victims must have the answers. This bill will help to provide these answers.

Information is the key to help with the victim's grief. Information about the criminal's release on parole or pardon or any pre-release. Let the victims know. We don't want to read it in the newspaper first. We want to have the opportunity to let our views be known to the proper agencies. The need to know and not feel helpless is essential. We need to act with the system, not react to it, because most of the time the reaction is futile.

The last point that I would like to make about bill 2513 is that there must be enforcement and funding of the bill. Without enforcement and funding, this bill isn't worth the paper it's printed on, and the victim will lose again. The victim has lost so much already, it just seems fair that they are given these basic rights. We need enforcement of bill 2513.

When you are writing or debating legislation on victim's rights, and you feel that you might have a problem with certain fiscal or enforcement issues for victims and you don't know how to vote, I want you to go home and hold the face of a person you love between your hands, kiss her forehead, and say goodbye.