

TESTIMONY OF JULIE GOOD  
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BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
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Good afternoon members of the Judiciary Committee and guest. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today concerning the rule-making power of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, relating to the death penalty appeal process.

I am executive director of the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia, a private non profit organization that addresses the cycle of violence in Philadelphia through victims service and prevention program. One of our two main programs is Families of Murder Victims (FMV). Families of Murder Victims was started in 1980 as a support group for relatives and close friends of homicide victims, who we call "co-victims." Over the past seventeen years, FMV has grown from the original support group to a multi-disciplinary victim service program, which provides a variety of supportive services to co-victims, including extensive assistance through the stages of the criminal justice system, case and system advocacy, and individual and group therapeutic counseling for adults and children. During this time we have provided services to thousands of co-victims both within and outside of Philadelphia.

We have learned over the years that the criminal justice system is one of many factors that can cause a secondary assault on homicide survivors. A secondary victimization can elicit a similar emotional reaction as that which occurs following the original criminal act. In some cases, a co-victim can be even more traumatized

by this second injury. The co-victim is in a state of emotional dependency, trusting that help will be provided by systems for which he or she has formed lifelong and trusting expectations. Because of this, co-victims are often further shocked and frustrated by lack of the criminal justice system's response to their needs.

This is especially true regarding the long delays that are caused by appeals in criminal litigations. In Pennsylvania it often takes fifteen years or more for all appeals to be heard and to not deny the defendant of any of his legal constitutional rights. During this period, co-victims repeatedly experience an acute grief reaction on each occasion the case is brought before the court. They are unable to work on their grief or to work through a resolution until the court has made a final ruling on the case. There are severe emotional reactions as one rehears and relives the circumstances of the murder in the courtroom. So in effect, homicide co-victims live in a clouded world of grief for years after the murder occurs.

Co-victims report that they must put their grief on hold during this time because emotional energy is not available to deal with both court proceedings and the emotional rigors of grief work.

Despite common perceptions, it is not true that all co-victims actively seek the death penalty for the murderers of their loved ones, especially in states, such as Pennsylvania, in which the criminal code includes a sentence of true life without parole. However, once an arrest has been made and a conviction secured, all co-victims need a final and unalterable conclusion to the criminal justice process in order to redirect their energy and attention to focusing on a new direction in life. Those of us who work closely with co-victims understand that life will never be the

same as it was before their tragic loss; the best situation they can achieve is a “new normal” that allows them to find peace and comfort in their future relationships.

However, as long as the appeals process extends through decades of time, this sense of closure and completeness is denied to co-victims. I heartily support all measures that will result in a reduction of the time needed to exhaust the proper constitutional appeals of defendants who are sentenced to the death penalty. Until that time, the criminal justice system will continue to inflict a second victimization of co-victims of homicide. It is unfortunately is all too true that in these cases for the surviving loved ones of homicide victims, justice delayed is truly justice denied.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue.