

Testimony in Opposition of House Bills (HBs) 4556-60 for the House Criminal Justice Committee

My name is Nicole Beverly, a resident of Ypsilanti Twp, Michigan. I am writing this statement to oppose HB's 4556-4560. I am incredibly disappointed that I will not be able to be there in person to share my opposition to HBs 4556-60, however I have a previously scheduled ACES trauma trainer certification training that was already scheduled several months ago.

As a Clinical Social Worker, Trauma Informed Therapist, Certified Domestic Violence Expert Witness and survivor of Domestic Violence, Aggravated Stalking and multiple attempts by my ex-husband to hire people to kill me and my children from prison, I stand firmly in the belief that without well thought out changes and exemptions this bill will not only repeatedly re-victimize crime victims and survivors but will also put many of their lives in direct jeopardy. The criminal justice and legal system have let me down many times as a victim and the thought that this legislation, if passed will take away the truth in sentencing that was promised to me at my ex-husbands sentencing is absolutely terrifying. I have been let down by the legal system far too many times already including law enforcement officers who didn't understand or take domestic violence seriously, sentencing guidelines for domestic violence and stalking that result in repeated slaps on the wrist for perpetrators of abuse putting victims in further danger, Judges who didn't understand the risks victims of domestic violence face and a parole board, which consisted of one member that interviews the victim and one that interviews the defendant who make life altering decisions for victims of crimes.

As victims of crime continue to lose funding, resources and safe shelter across our state I am troubled deeply by this proposed legislation. When I have had conversations with legislators in support of this bill and other early release bills I have been repeatedly disappointed by the lack of knowledge many of them actually have about this legislation and its direct impact on countless victims in this state. The fact that this bill will take away the one thing they have, security and knowledge of when their perpetrators will be released is unjust, unfair and cruel. Taking away their ability to live their lives without looking over their shoulders, facing repeated retraumatization through notices of court dates and motions filed when they have already been through this process in order to get the convictions they fought so hard for is simply wrong. In fact the minute I begin to talk with someone about this legislation I begin to feel retraumatized because the possibility of having my ex-husband released will put my life in danger. At this moment I know exactly how much time I have left before I have to change my identity and relocate but this bill will take every part of that safe certainty that I have away from me and thousands of other victims and for many of us it is truly the only hope that we are holding on to.

While I agree that our criminal justice system needs reform and revamping and many individuals are serving sentencing terms for non-violent crimes that are unjust, the answer is not to blindly open the floodgates for all. I am not sure when the focus turned so sharply from protecting victims of violent crimes which included providing them resources, shelter and other supports to instead cutting victim related funds drastically but I am gravely concerned about the impact this is already having on victims in our state. I will oppose this bill until well thought out research into recidivism of certain crimes and expert and victim input is taken seriously and added in to prevent further harm to victims in our state. This legislation will lead to courts being tied up for years making it impossible for victims of current crimes to receive justice and protections, repeated retraumatization of victims whose perpetrators file motions and are released under this bill and undoubtedly it will put victims of several crimes back in harm's way.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Nicole Beverly, LMSW, SSW