

Senate Judiciary Committee
S.261 - Eliminating life without parole
Chris Fenno, Executive Director
Senate Judiciary Committee – February 13, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Center’s opinion on the proposed changes to the sentence of life without parole. The Vermont Center for Crime Victims Services opposes this legislation. The Center supports keeping the sentence of life without parole for crimes that warrant this severe sentence.

For victims and their families, the possibility of parole at some later date, means that the event is never over. The possibility of parole hearings for the most egregious crimes, where victims and their families would potentially be retraumatized, does not take into account the gravity of the violence committed nor the fact that their sentence as grieving friends and families never ends.

It is important to provide judges with the discretion to sentence offenders to life without parole for crimes that warrant such a sentence. This discretion is relevant, as well, to cases where plea agreements may have reduced charges but the crime still warrants a sentence of life without parole.

Finally, the Center does not support that this sentence would be for 18 years and older at the time of the commission of the offence only for aggravated murder. There may be cases where the murder may not meet the aggravated murder definition and still warrant life without parole. The Center supports leaving this in the hands of the judge.

We encourage this Committee to consider not removing the sentence of life without parole at this time. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

