



S. 261 - Senate Judiciary Committee: An Act Relating to Eliminating Life Without Parole
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February 06, 2020

Thank you for considering this important topic, and for allowing us to provide this written testimony. The Vermont Network is neutral on the issue of eliminating life without parole prospectively. We are opposed to eliminating life without the possibility of parole for individuals who have already been convicted and sentenced.

In considering whether to end the practice of sentencing individuals to life without parole, The Vermont Network would like to highlight the potential long-term impact that this change will have on future victims and surviving family members. While it is true that a very small percentage of cases in Vermont end in a sentence of life without parole, the cases that do often involve many grieving friends and family members.

Research indicates that after a violent crime, surviving family members often experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and their recovery is often prolonged by repeated interactions with the criminal justice system.¹ Generally, these symptoms decrease over time, but they have been shown to grow worse during times of criminal proceedings.² Being asked to participate in parole board hearings – especially decades after a crime - has the potential to increase the psychological distress experienced by surviving family members. If life without parole is eliminated, these individuals would lose the sense of closure and finality that they are now afforded, thereby adversely impacting their mental health and ability to fully heal.

For this reason, it is critically important that investments remain in providing access to long-term victim services and advocacy, and for victims to be supported through Parole Board proceedings.

¹ Masters, R., Friedman, L.N. & Getzel, G. Helping families of homicide victims: A multidimensional approach. *J Trauma Stress* **1**, 109–125 (1988). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00974908>

² <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0269758016684421>