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PRESS RELEASE

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Crime Victims United and California District Attorneys Association Hold Joint Press Conference in Opposition to Senate Bill 94

SB 94 Would Allow Murderers Sentenced to Life Without Parole to Seek Release into Our Communities

Sacramento, CA – Today, Crime Victims United (CVU) hosted a joint press conference along with the California District Attorneys Association (CDAA) to talk about the negative impact Senate Bill (SB) 94 would have on victims, public safety, and criminal justice. The two organizations were joined by Sacramento Sheriff Jim Cooper, Assembly Member Dr. Jasmeet Bains (D-35), Monterey County District Attorney Jeannine Pacioni, and leaders from the law enforcement community (PORAC, CPCA, CSSA, ALADS) to express their opposition to SB 94 – a proposal that would enable those convicted of murder by a jury of their peers to petition the court for resentencing, which could allow the release of dozens of violent criminals.

The full press conference can be viewed online here: <https://twitter.com/CrimeVictimsCa>

“My son and I traveled over 2,500 miles to oppose SB 94, which could set free the man who viciously tortured my mother, dousing her with gasoline and setting her on fire,” said **Vanetta Perdue, daughter of Monterey County murder victim Denise Albury, whose mother was murdered by her father**. “My mother pleaded for her life and ours. Murderers like Samuel Windham earned Life Without Parole. SB 94 denies justice to my mother and peace to my family.”

“This bill is a dangerous and misguided attempt at reform that prioritizes the interests of convicted murderers over the well-being of their victims and the safety of our communities,” said **CVU President Nina Salarno Besselman**. “Allowing those who have committed heinous crimes to apply for re-sentencing and release sends a chilling message to crime victims: your pain and suffering matters less than the rights of your perpetrators. As long as these convicted killers have spent behind bars, that time pales in comparison to the lifetime of healing and grieving that victims and their families have to go through.”

SB 94 would make California’s communities less safe and unnecessarily re-traumatize the families of victims who have found some solace in the knowledge that those responsible for murdering their loved ones will remain incarcerated for life without the possibility of parole. Furthermore, SB 94 includes no requirement that the killer show any remorse for their crime or sign of rehabilitation.

“While I am committed to evaluating and supporting measures that seek to positively reform our criminal justice system, I firmly believe that any legislation related to public safety must first consider the profound impact on victims and their families,” said **Assembly Member Dr. Jasmeet Bains (D-35)**. “We owe it to

those impacted by these crimes to thoroughly vet and scrutinize legislation from the perspective of how it will impact their healing and ongoing sense of security. While rehabilitation is important, this bill simply fails to live up to the moral standard that we as legislators must hold ourselves to.”

As California continues to experience a spike in violent crime and a severe law enforcement staffing shortage, SB 94 is a dangerous step in the wrong direction that prioritizes the release of those convicted of the most heinous crimes over the needs of victims and the public.

“As a former lawmaker, as the current Sheriff for Sacramento County, and as a career-long member of the law enforcement profession, I can say with confidence that this bill will do far more harm than good,” said **Sacramento Sheriff Jim Cooper**. “We are talking about a group of uniquely vicious criminals here. You don’t get life without parole for stealing a candy bar. These are killers, these are predators.”

SB 94 would also subvert judicial discretion and place an undue burden on the judicial system. It tips the scale by forcing judges to lean towards resentencing in each case by requiring “great weight” to be given to certain factors rather than allowing for an objective decision to be made. If the bill is passed into law, the demand for judges to reconsider decades-old cases would unduly burden the court system, potentially at the expense of current cases.

“SB 94 retraumatizes the families of murder victims by allowing the worst murderers, including murderers who have tortured their victims, killed children, or chose their victims because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religion, the opportunity to shorten their sentences,” said **Monterey County District Attorney Jeannine Pacioni**. “Creating bills such as SB 94 that seek to undo legally valid sentences many decades after the fact not only ignores the decisions of the judges and jurors who heard all the facts of the case at the time, but also will cause victims and the public to lose faith in the judicial process and the finality of judgments.”

What Are California’s Leaders in Law Enforcement Saying About SB 94?

“SB 94 sends the wrong message, not just to victims, but also to California’s peace officers,” said **Brian Marvel, President of the Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC)**. “Not only does SB 94 tell victims their pain doesn’t matter, it tells all California law enforcement that while they are out there risking their lives to put dangerous criminals behind bars, our elected leaders are working to put them back on the streets.”

“SB 94 would open the door to the potential release of hundreds of violent criminals back into our communities without any requirement that these killers have been rehabilitated or even shown remorse,” said **Sheriff Mike Boudreaux, President of the California State Sheriffs’ Association (CSSA)**. “We cannot underestimate the damage this will cause to the victims’ families and their memories.”

“At a time when we are seeing violent crime increase across California, the absolute last thing we need to do is pass legislation that would allow the release of our most violent and heinous murderers,” said **Alex Gammelgard, President of the California Police Chiefs Association (CPCA)**. “Our communities want to see solutions to the crimes occurring right now. SB 94 is going in the opposite direction.”

“When legislators pursue public safety legislation from a purely academic perspective holding up stats and figures to prove a point, they are probably missing the point entirely,” said **Richard Pippin, President of the Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs (ALADS)**. “That’s exactly what is happening here with SB 94. The author saw an opportunity to do something novel based on some study, and completely ignored the very real and incalculable impact it would have on victims and their families.”

Some of the defendants who would be eligible to petition for resentencing under SB 94 include:

- Samuel Windham of Monterey, who in 1982 burned his wife alive, setting their home on fire while his wife and children were inside. Their children were rescued and continue to live with the trauma of escaping death at the hands of their father.
- David Alan Weeding of San Diego, who entered a woman’s apartment and attempted to rape her. The violent act was thwarted by her husband, who came home and stopped the rape. Weeding stabbed the woman’s husband to death. Because Weeding was not convicted of rape, he would be eligible to apply for resentencing.
- Richard Philips of Madera County, who in 1977 lured two Vietnam veterans into a rural area where he shot them multiple times, stole their wallets, then doused them in gasoline and lit them on fire. One victim survived the horrifying experience. Philips was convicted and sentenced to life without parole, even after a 2019 retrial.

- Arthur Chris Burbridge of San Diego strangled and killed two women, whom he admitted to raping, but he only pled guilty to murder so he would be eligible to apply for resentencing.
 - George Herbert Wharton of Santa Barbara beat his girlfriend to death and stuffed her body in a barrel in the kitchen of their apartment in 1987.
 - Jason Leroy Smith of Sonoma sliced the wrists of an 88-year-old victim and then burned down the house he was in.
 - Tim Dale Morris of Ventura in 1985 burglarized the home of an elderly, deaf, one-legged man whom Morris beat to death in his own bed. Morris had a previous burglary conviction.
 - Thaddaeus Turner of Merced, who in 1984 invaded a man's home and robbed him. In the course of the robbery, he stabbed the man over 40 times with a buck knife, causing him to bleed to death.
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