



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Tedisco

## Give Voice to the Forgotten New Yorkers: Crime Victims

JAMES TEDISCO May 5, 2025

| ISSUE: **BAIL LAW; CRIMINAL JUSTICE; DISCOVERY; LAW ENFORCEMENT; CRIME VICTIMS**



*By Senator Jim Tedisco*

New York has a broken parole system that makes it difficult for crime victims and their families to have meaningful input on decisions about whether to free those convicted of violent crimes.

No one understands this more than the families of the late Shenendehowa students Deanna Rivers and Christopher Stewart who were tragically killed in 2012 on the Northway by a

drunk, drugged, and serial dangerous driver.

Previously, while in state prison, the person convicted of Christopher and Deanna's murder, Dennis Drue, would come up before the state Parole Board every two years, adding terrible anguish to the Stewart and Rivers families.

Michael and Regina Stewart and Brian and Debbie Rivers, the parents of Christopher Stewart and Deanna Rivers, were forced to go through the heartbreaking process of speaking before the Parole Board every time Drue had a parole hearing.

Shockingly, when victims and families give their impact statements to the Parole Board, they may only speak to one board member, with no guarantee that individual will be on the panel to make or be part of the decision as to whether or not to parole that incarcerated violent criminal.

In New York, this frustrating situation is faced by many crime victims and their families who want to make their voices heard.

It's time to put crime victims first by passing bi-partisan legislation I authored, "**Christopher's and Deanna's Law**" (S.24), named in loving memory of Christopher Stewart and Deanna Rivers, to ensure victim impact statements are video recorded.

The bill requires all victim impact statements to be video recorded and mandates all Parole Board members who vote on parole for an offender, must watch the videos before making their decision, if the members do not meet with victims and their families in person.

As I said, "Christopher's and Deanna's Law" is bipartisan. Majority Democratic Assemblyman John McDonald is sponsoring the measure in the Assembly.

This week, Dennis Drue, who was released on parole early from state prison in 2023 thanks to the disastrous “less is more” law, was back before a judge again after being charged last month with allegedly giving a false name to police. Drue admitted at his parole hearing that he was operating a vehicle he was not allowed to and that he did not have a mandated interlock device installed.

Shockingly, the Administrative Law Judge who presided over Drue’s most recent parole hearing to see whether he should go back to prison, initially told the Stewart and Rivers family that they would be unable to speak at the hearing due to what I believe is a loophole in state law that does not provide a procedure for victim impact statements in these type of hearings.

While Michael Stewart was able to read a statement after I intervened, the Rivers family were not extended the same courtesy. This is unacceptable. I am currently researching closing this loophole legislatively.

I’m also a sponsor of [legislation to extend the waiting period between mandated parole hearings](#) from 24 to 60 months in cases where the inmate applying for parole was sentenced for a violent crime (S.142).

This is against the backdrop of Governor Hochul’s outrageous plan to further insult crime victims by chopping 110 days off the prison sentences for many inmates because she refuses to negotiate in good faith with our correction officers.

Can the Governor give 110 days of stress-free living to the victims whose lives were forever altered by these criminals?

We can be compassionate for people who have made mistakes, done their time, and are trying to turn their lives around, but first and foremost, we need justice and compassion for

crime victims.

If our state's leaders want to be serious about turning things around in New York and stop the mass exodus of people fleeing the state, then they must make fighting crime and public safety priority number one and that starts with supporting a “**Victims First**” agenda.

My heart aches for the Stewart and Rivers families who are again reminded of the terrible loss of their beautiful children Christopher and Deanna that they have endured and had to revisit every time they dealt with the state Parole Board.

We need to pass the bi-partisan “*Christopher’s and Deanna’s Law*” to enhance the voices of our forgotten citizens - crime victims — and ensure victim impact statements are video recorded and mandate all state Parole Board members who vote on parole for an offender must watch the videos before making their decision.

It’s time to fix the broken parole system to prevent a miscarriage of justice.

They say seeing is believing. It’s time to truly make crime victims seen and heard.

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### 2025-S24

- 
- Introduced
  - - In Committee Assembly
    - In Committee Senate

- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Requires that all victim impact statements in New York state be video recorded; requires that the members of the parole board review all relevant victim impact statements prior to the conduct of a parole hearing

December 16, 2024

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Sponsored by **James Tedisco**

Do you support this bill?

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## 2025-S142

- 
- Introduced
  - ◦ In Committee Assembly

- In Committee Senate
- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
- On Floor Calendar Senate
- ◦ Passed Assembly
- Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
- 

Increases from twenty-four to sixty months, the time for which reconsideration for parole for a violent felony offense shall be determined

December 19, 2024

In Senate Committee **Crime Victims, Crime and Correction**

Sponsored by **Anthony H. Palumbo**

Do you support this bill?