

House Republican Press Release

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It's Time to Toughen Repeat Offender Laws



Opinion by Rep. Ray Kalinowski

The recent tragedy in Cheshire in which a mother and her young daughters were brutally murdered in a home invasion by two paroled convicts captured the attention of state and national media. It has left a mourning family and community in its wake, and many state residents rightly asking how such a crime could have taken place.

Neither of the two suspects had previously committed a crime considered violent; no murders or assaults. Media reports quickly pointed out that the Parole Board did not have full information such as sentencing transcripts available when they were reviewing at least one of the suspects.

This case certainly does bring to light a number of very serious flaws in our laws concerning consistent repeat offenders. The criminal justice system needs some immediate legislative changes to prevent these kinds of individuals from slipping through the cracks again. I have joined with House Republicans in the General Assembly in calling for a special session of the legislature to do just that.

We want to strengthen Connecticut's persistent offender laws, reclassify burglary of a home as a violent crime, implement an effective 'Three Strikes' law that mandates life imprisonment for a third conviction for a violent crime, and makes needed changes to the parole process. We would require that dangerous felons serve at least 85% of their sentences, a mandatory five-year sentence for those who commit burglary in the first and second degrees, and require serious offenders to wear global positioning devices as a term of their release.

Making our need to act all the more critical, the State Supreme Court recently ruled in a case involving a lifetime criminal named Arnold Bell, who was convicted in the shooting of a New Haven police officer. Prior to that, he had repeated felony convictions. The Court ruled that the jury, not the judge, has the power to decide what sentence Bell receives.

We have asked that this special session be called before the end of October. Waiting until the legislature's next scheduled regular session February of 2008 wastes precious time.