

November 2nd, 2021

To whom it may concern:

My name is Jessica Combs and I am the mother of homicide victim, Ronnie Bowers III. My son, Ronnie, was just 16 when he lost his life to senseless gun violence on September 4th, 2016 in Kettering, Ohio. Ronnie was kind, polite, and an all around great kid! He is a victim of the most gruesome crime known to man; murder.

I sat in the hospital with Ronnie for 5 days, watching his body deteriorate. I had to plan a funeral for my 16 year old son, instead of planning for his future. I never imagined the legal fight that would follow, for the next 3.5 years, would be as difficult or as horrifying as it was.

My family and I did not know anything about how the courts operated, what the charges against the accused meant, or how to proceed with everything regarding Ronnie's murder trial. Although our prosecutor was phenomenal and we had 2 victims advocates provided by the county court, our family still was not being informed of the many twists and turns the case was taking. This is when I sought out the Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center in April 2017, and also started researching Marsy's Law that was passed in Ohio November 2017.

Marsy's Law gave victims and their families 6 rights; the right to be heard at sentencing, the right to be notified of court proceedings and changes to offender status, the right to information, the right to be treated fairly with dignity and respect, the right to be present at court hearings, and the right to restitution.

While these rights may not seem significant, when a victim and their family is in turmoil, knowing this can be crucial. For myself and my family, we were thrown into a vicious court battle, alone, grieving, traumatized repeatedly, and not knowing what was next or what to expect. I had just buried my 16 year old son. How was I supposed to navigate a murder case?

All of that changed once Marsy's Law went into effect for Ohio, but it is simply not enough! This is where House Bill 343 becomes necessary for victims and their families. As a homicide survivor, it would have been a monumental help to know about victims rights from the beginning. A Marsy's Card would make ALL the difference for victims and families to navigate criminal proceedings, from early in the process, when all we're doing is trying to live from one day to the next. We need, for our own safety, increased protection against public disclosure of our personal information. We need protection during the discovery process.

There were at least twice where I was denied speaking at a juvenile offenders release hearing, which is something I can never get back. Also, twice I was not promptly notified of 2 offender

releases. This is where HB 343 would help keep victims and their families SAFE! We already look over our shoulder every time we leave our house.

As a mother who lost my teen son to a heinous crime, trauma is expressed when I talk about Ronnie, and when I talk about the nightmare of what transpired for 3.5 years following his funeral. Everyone says a parent shouldn't have to bury their child. A victim and their family members shouldn't have to endure grueling court proceedings without the safeguarding of victims rights in place and be forced to navigate through something they never signed up for.

Crime victims and their families should be protected by laws just as much as the accused is protected. We didn't choose this. We have been through enough. House Bill 343 is necessary to prevent victims and their families from being further traumatized by the complexities in the justice they seek.

Thank you for your time,  
Jessica Combs,  
mother of 16yr old homicide victim, Ronnie Bowers III