

September 17, 2026

Good morning,

Thank you for bringing this group together today to discuss felony murder. I am Deanna Weaver, Program Director of Victim Witness Services in the Office of the District Attorney of Lancaster County. For the past six months, we have heard a lot about this topic and how it would benefit many offenders across our Commonwealth. I am here to tell you how this has caused additional harm to some 1100 families who have already suffered more than most can imagine.

For the past 20 years here in Lancaster, in addition to my last 2 years in this field in York County, I have had the distinct and challenging privilege of working with families of homicide victims. As victim advocates, we walk alongside families through their darkest days. I can tell you that in my 30 plus years in victim services, I have learned the most from the victims we serve. Some of the most impactful moments in my career have been standing with families who have lost so much yet somehow find the courage to show up. They show up for the meetings with our prosecutors, for the preliminary hearings, for pre-trial hearings, for the trials and guilty pleas, and for the appeal hearings. They show up because their loved ones cannot. Every phone call from us and certainly every court proceeding is a reminder of the worst thing that has ever happened in their lives. Even so, they persist- hoping to see justice and accountability- an outcome that will close the criminal justice chapter. For many families, that is when they can finally start to heal. Until that point, they live in a state of limbo, because the criminal justice chapter is still unfinished. Families are exhausted from all the delays in the system, the ongoing discussion of the case and finally the actual court events. Though the void of lost loved ones can never be filled, seeing offenders held accountable and the finality of a sentence can allow them to move ahead in the healing process. If this sounds excruciating, that's because it is.

Now imagine that 5, 10, 25 years have passed since the offender who killed your loved one was sentenced. Just when you might be able to talk about it without falling apart, just when you are able to focus on other things in life, you are informed that the offender's sentence is no longer valid and so the case is opened again. The scars are once again, open wounds.

Truth in sentencing- something victims need to find their equilibrium following such trauma- is gone. Their loved one is still missing from every milestone event. The "what might have been" thoughts are still in the minds of every parent who lost a child. The empty

chairs at the tables of these families are still empty. But the sense of justice they finally found or at least accepted is now threatened, and for the past six months, these families have had to ask, "What now?"

As victim advocates, one of the first things we provide to these families in addition to support, is information- accurate information. When people experience the trauma of a homicide, chaos often takes over as lives are turned upside down. Providing accurate information for families, helping them plan and prepare for what is next, is an important way we attempt to mitigate the chaos and help them regain some sense of control. With the state of felony murder right now, we are unable to do this, because we have no solid answers. We cannot help families prepare for the future when we are still asking questions ourselves.

At the beginning I mentioned the impact of this situation on the offenders. Please don't forget that for every offender convicted of second-degree murder, there is at least one person missing from these discussions. Those victims do not have the opportunity for another chance. At the very least, families of homicide victims need us to remember their loved ones. Let's acknowledge the pain they have suffered and loss they endure every day. They need answers. We, as victim advocates, need answers so we can do our job of assisting families who now must come to terms with a new ending to their criminal justice journey. The rug has been pulled out from under these families. It is time to help them back up again.

Thank you.