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The Crime Victims Bureau was established in 1992 by a group of homicide survivors from different parts of California. Through the Bureau and its foundation, we have worked with hundreds of victims and survivors of violent crime. It is with that perspective, and, as the sister of a murder victim that I view the issue of parole and parolees. My bias is that when in doubt, we should always err on the side of protecting the law-abiding citizen rather than gambling on a parole-violating felon. While many view the cost of failed paroles in state dollars, I have to view it in human suffering because we so often become personally involved with its victims.

The goals for parole as they relate to the public safety are clear; we should do everything possible to insure against future victims, as well as protecting those who have already been harmed. It seems to me that the most productive time to engage the use of risk evaluation would be before the inmate is released. At a time when we have determinate sentencing for most violent crimes, we have almost no avenues available for preventing the release of violent offenders who are unprepared for parole and likely to re-offend. Especially in cases involving the types of sex offenders who typically have multiple victims over a period of time, determinate sentences with automatic parole is a bad idea. The current Sexually Violent Predator and Mentally Disordered Sex offender laws provide only very limited safeguards.

So, once again, it seems to me that the most prudent time to intercede with someone who is likely to do poorly on parole is before they are paroled. If we are going to impose certain mandatory programs for parolees, such as anger management courses, parenting courses or education, how much more successful would the parolee be if those programs were mandated as conditions of parole? I believe that communities in general would feel less threatened and more supportive of parolees if they felt that dangerous people were not being indiscriminately released on an unsuspecting public.

When an inmate has been released, a one-size fits all program is obviously not going to be effective in every case. The parolee's criminal history, his personality, attitude, general behavior and the amount of "clean time" prior to the violation should be considered in regards to parole supervision and when deciding whether or not to revoke parole over a technical violation. Failing to report or testing dirty may simply be a brief lapse of judgment for one individual but could be a red flag that another is moving back into a pattern of behavior that was present at the time of the commitment offense. We believe that well-trained parole officers are the public's first line of defense. But parole officers should not have to carry caseloads that make it impossible to closely monitor and assist the parolees under their supervision. More parole officers with lighter case loads

would be good investment toward helping parolees succeed and protecting the public safety.

It has been my experience that community-based organizations can often fill gaps in the system and provide services that might not otherwise be available. We have made efforts to establish relationships with prosecutors, police officers and criminal justice agencies whenever possible because it makes it easier for us to help more victims more effectively. It seems that programs to encourage these kinds of community-based efforts and alliances could be very beneficial to parolees who want to succeed but lack the support they need. As far as a role for victims and their advocates in community-based programs, it is of course a matter of personal choice on the part of individual victims. It is my personal opinion, based on 15 years of experience, that victim-offender programs are rarely effective and often cause further harm to victims who expect to find some kind of satisfying closure that simply does not exist. The bottom line is that we do not like to see victims pressured into feeling that they are somehow responsible for fixing offenders when they themselves were terribly harmed. That pressure often begins when standing over the coffin of a murdered child, someone asks the parents if they have forgiven the murderer yet. The pressure continues in many ways and victims should not be expected to embrace criminals, whether those criminals are eventually going to be released into society or not.

One area that victims can be of value, and should be listened to has to do with the threat of future violence by their offenders. Often, when the offender is someone with whom the victim had a prior relationship, that victim can interpret words or behaviors better than any criminal justice expert. We work with victims all the time who hear through mutual acquaintances that their assailant is using drugs again, carrying a weapon again, hanging out with old friends again, and that victim recognizes a pattern of behavior that was present at the time of the commitment offense. Often victims can bring to the BPT commissioners at parole hearings information about their perpetrator that was not adjudicated because the DA didn't think it was important to prove the case; or can speak about threatening contacts that have been made through third parties while the inmate was incarcerated. A new BPT policy that restricts victim testimony in parole hearings, limiting them to speaking only about the adjudicated facts of the crime and the victim's "feelings" about the perpetrator is unfair and dangerous, tying victims hands when they believe they could be in future danger if their offender is released on parole. Input from victims can be of value, but only if they are not automatically dismissed as being over emotional or vindictive.