

'Helen's Law' returns to Parliament

The Prisoners (Disclosure of Information About Victims) Bill will place a legal duty on the Parole Board to consider the anguish caused by murderers who refuse to disclose the location of a victim's body when considering release.

The Bill, which is being reintroduced following the General Election, will also apply to paedophiles who take indecent images of children but refuse to reveal the identity of their victims.

Parole Board guidance is already clear that offenders who withhold information may still pose a risk to the public and could therefore be denied parole. 'Helen's Law' will however make it a legal requirement for the Parole Board to consider the withholding of information when deciding if an offender should be released.

The new law follows the tireless campaigning of Marie McCourt, mother of Helen McCourt who was murdered in 1988 but whose killer has never revealed her body's location.

Human rights legislation protects against arbitrary detention, and the proposed new law balances this with the need to keep the public safe. The proposals also take into account instances where, for example, a murderer may genuinely not know the location of a victim's body if it has been moved.

Notes to editors

- [The Prisoners \(disclosure of information about victims\) Bill](#) will put in statute, and therefore beyond doubt, the Parole Board's established practice of considering a failure by an offender to disclose specific information when deciding on parole for those convicted of murder, manslaughter, or taking, or making, indecent photographs of children.
- Courts can already pass tougher sentences for murderers who deliberately conceal the location of a body.
- The changes to the release test build on wider reforms to the parole system, announced last year, that will allow victims the opportunity to request the reconsideration of a release decision. This forms part of sweeping changes to bring more transparency and accountability to the parole process and improve the support to victims.
- Applications for reconsideration will only be merited where there is a clear likelihood that the process may have been procedurally or legally flawed. It will not apply to decisions which are challenging and unpopular but have nevertheless clearly been carried out strictly in line with the lawful requirements and normal standards of practice for Parole Board members.