



## TIME FOR TRUTH IN SENTENCING

If there were ever two words that should never be combined in the same sentence, they are 'parole' and 'murderer'.

The idea that convicted killers should be released from prison before their time is both obscene and absurd. Such misplaced leniency is an insult to the families of their past victims. It is also an injury to the future victims who are likely to suffer from new acts of thuggery.

The figures speak for themselves. 64% of paroled inmates will be found guilty of a new offence within two years of leaving prison. Almost half of Victoria's convicted killers and 51% of the state's sex offenders will commit fresh criminal acts within seven years of their discharge.

But statistics – however grim – can only reveal so much. This is a human story of innocent Victorians brutalised by convicted criminals who should never have seen the outside of a prison cell.

The toll of tragedy includes Colleen and Laura Irwin, the twenty-something sisters who were raped and killed in January 2006 by William John Watkins. Watkins had a lengthy record of violent offences. He was clearly a ticking crime bomb; a rampage waiting to happen.

Watkins was already serving time when he was prosecuted in 2000 for additional acts of criminal violence. He was found guilty, but for reasons beyond all rational comprehension, the court allowed him to serve his new gaol sentences concurrently. And so this hoodlum's already-inadequate stint behind bars was extended by a mere 90 days. In May 2004, he moved into the same apartment building where the Irwin sisters lived. Eighteen months later the girls were dead.

Then there is Michael Vincent Lane, who in 2003 was convicted of strangling his mother to death. But like William Watkins, Lane should never have been in a position to touch a hair on anyone's head. At the time he committed this killing, he was enjoying the unjustified freedom of a parole from a previous gaol sentence for murder.

And earlier this year, another killer was prematurely set free. The trial judge handed down a life sentence to Anthony Arthur Stone for the rape, mutilating and stabbing death of an intellectually disabled woman.

But in the doublespeak of the Victorian court system, life in prison means anything but. Stone was granted parole at the earliest possible date and today he walks our streets a free man.

The Watkins, Lane and Stone cases are emblematic of a justice system that has lost its way. Our courts appear to be more concerned about the privileges of the guilty than the protection of the innocent.

Lenient sentencing and lax parole policies mean that far too many predators are released far too soon. And this massive policy failure is the direct responsibility of those who write our laws and appoint our judges.

The most sacred responsibility of government is to provide for the safety of its citizens. John Brumby and Attorney General Rob Hulls have failed this duty to Victorians.

The primary purpose of our criminal justice system is to keep the lawless from preying on the lawful. And if an overly permissive judiciary fails to ensure our protection, then parliament is morally obligated to fill that breach of trust.

But such deliverance will not come from a Labor Government that has been stacking the Victorian courts with powder-puff judges since 1999.

Victoria is in dire need of legislation that will abolish parole for violent offences and impose lengthy mandatory minimum prison terms for heinous crimes. With such laws in place, for the first time in a long time, villains would be forced to take their crimes as seriously as their victims do.

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