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Summit County Prosecutor Pushes for Constitutional Amendment in Ohio for Victim Rights

Marsy's Law Would Provide Constitutionally Guaranteed Rights for Crime Victims

AKRON, Ohio (Wednesday, April 5, 2017) – Summit County Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh, along with local members of law enforcement, today announced her support of Marsy's Law for Ohio. Prosecutor Walsh joins a growing list of Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys in backing the crime victim bill of rights constitutional amendment.

"I have spent nearly my entire career fighting for the rights of crime victims. That is why I support Marsy's Law for Ohio," said Prosecutor Walsh. "The constitutional amendment would guarantee basic rights for crime victims and make sure they are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness."

Showing their support of Marsy's Law with Prosecutor Walsh were Cathy Harper Lee, Director of Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center, and Ronda Blankenship, who survived a horrible attack on New Year's Eve of 2013 in her Barberton home. Ronda's boyfriend and his two teenaged children were executed during a robbery. Ronda amazingly survived after being shot in the head and stabbed in the face. Ronda is using her courage and incredible will to live to be an advocate for victims' rights.

"A person charged with a crime has rights. But victims are often times left without any protection – victimized again and again," said Blankenship. "This needs to change. Victims deserve better – and should be protected."

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The announcement coincides with National Crime Victims' Rights Week. Historically, the first week of April is chosen to honor crime victims and to remind victim advocates to recommit to their mission of ensuring all victims of crime are afforded their rights.

Under the Marsy's Law for Ohio amendment, crime victims would have the right to notification of all proceedings as well as be guaranteed the right to be heard at every step of the process. Victims would have the right to have input on all plea deals for offenders as well as the right to restitution resulting from the financial impact of the crime.

"Marsy's Law will ensure crime victims receive equal protections and equal access to justice," said Cathy Harper Lee, executive director of the Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center. "Far too many crime victims have been denied their most basic rights. Marsy's Law corrects this injustice by informing crime victims of their rights, the status of their cases and ensures they receive notice of hearings that can impact their safety."

Prosecutor Walsh was also joined by several members of Summit County's law enforcement community, including Akron Police Chief James Nice, Summit County Sheriff Steve Barry, Barberton Police Chief Vince Morber, Leanne Graham, Director of Summit County Victim Assistance Program, and Terri Heckman, Director of Battered Women's Shelter of Summit and Medina Counties.

The Marsy's Law for Ohio campaign is an 88-county movement to place a crime victims bill of rights into the Ohio Constitution. The effort in Ohio comes after similar ballot issues were approved in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Illinois and California.

The Marsy's Law for Ohio campaign has cleared the initial legal hurdles and signature-gathers are beginning to collect the 305,591 valid signatures needed to place the amendment on the November 7 General Election ballot. Under Ohio law, signatures are due on July 5.

The Marsy's Law movement began in 1983, when Marsy Nicholas was stalked and killed by her ex-boyfriend in California. Only a week after her murder, Marsy's family, walked into a grocery store where they saw the accused murderer. The family, who had just visited Marsy's grave, had no idea the accused murderer had been released on bail.

Marsy's family founded Marsy's Law for All to ensure the re-victimization the family experienced after being thrust into the criminal justice process does not happen to anyone else. The organization works to provide victims and their families across the country with constitutional protections and equal rights.