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**Good Morning. My name is Dr. Samuel Rieger. Most of you know me. For those of you who don't, I am currently President of the Melanie Ilene Rieger Memorial Foundation and Chairman of the Melanie Ilene Rieger Memorial Conference Against Violence, the most definitive conference of its kind in the United States. The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will be held on April 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> at the Department of Correction Maloney Center for Training & Staff Development in Cheshire. The theme will be "Youth Violence: School & Community Tragedies". I also served as President of Survivors of Homicide for 6 years.**

**On May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1994, our beautiful 19 year old daughter was strangled to death in our home by her ex-boyfriend, inmate #230602. She had already begun to help those less fortunate than herself and was a college student studying social work/psychology so that she could continue her efforts. Wanda and I have dedicated our lives to continue Melanie's work, to help homicide survivors who have come after us and to advocate for victims' rights.**

**Having been involved intimately with the criminal justice system for 13 years, I can tell you that the problems regarding the CT criminal justice system revealed by the Petit Family tragedy, are simply the tip of the iceberg. I would hope that your efforts will result in a complete overhaul of the criminal justice system. I would characterize it as one of expediency, financial considerations over public safety, and a total lack of accountability.**

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**It would seem that there has been a tremendous concentration on a more effective "3 strikes law" which is extremely important. But, how many violent perpetrators never get to that point. Expedient justice causes many perpetrators to be released without any charges being brought or on bail, never to be seen again, unless they are arrested for another crime. How many criminals progress from non-violent to more violent crimes to homicide because they are given the impression that they can "beat the system"? Plea bargains may be a necessary evil when evidence is minimal. However, why plea bargain a case when there is a preponderance of evidence? In our case, the administrative judge wanted a plea bargain. We objected vehemently. Only because the defendant's attorney advised him not to take the plea bargain did our case go to trial. Expedient justice. Inmate #230602 was convicted and sentenced to 60 years(not the 40 year plea bargain deal) although he is eligible for good time which could reduce his sentence by about 1/3.**

**Often to make a plea deal more attractive, the charges are lessened and the sentence reduced. Violent criminals are sentenced for lesser felonies and made to serve minimal sentences. How often do we hear about child predators given miniscule sentences and victimizing young children when they are released. We are constantly recycling violent felons to the street, knowing full well that they will victimize again.**

**Further, as highlighted by the Petit Case, violent criminals released on parole are required to list their addresses on the sex**

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**offender website, often slip through the cracks and eventually return to prison after committing new felonies. The major fear of homicide survivors is that the murderers will be released back into society only to destroy the lives of other innocent victims. They have all the rights and we have none. We must protect our citizens no matter what the cost(average cost of incarceration is \$41,000/year). It is better to spend the money prior to a tragedy than after. It would seem to me that \$41,000 is a small price to pay to protect human life.**

**About one month ago, we had to sit through the 6<sup>th</sup> appeal in our case. The fact that Melanie was violently murdered seems to have been lost by the criminal justice system. It is only the rights of inmate #230602 that are important. He is currently incarcerated at Northern C.I., CT's super max prison. He has been there for 1 ½ years. Only the most violent criminals go to Northern and it usually takes about 9-10 months for them to complete the program for return to a level 4 prison. And, this is his 3<sup>rd</sup> time at Northern. What does this say about inmate #230602? But he still has his rights. How about the safety of those who must transport him and those in the Rockville Courthouse? He is represented by a special public defender, his second, for which the state has to pay an additional fee. This person has been particularly rude and obnoxious in the courtroom and to us in particular. The prosecutor, new to our case, has consistently resisted speaking with us when we have requested such and arrived at the courthouse 5 minutes before the scheduled appeal. She appeared to be unprepared and ineffective in her presentation. It would appear that only the rights of victims are subject to financial constraints.**

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**Which brings me to my final point involving accountability.**

**Those in the criminal justice system must be held accountable when they fail to carry out their responsibilities properly. Certainly, this was highlighted in the Petit Case where those who paroled the two perpetrators had no paperwork to examine before making their decision. Certainly, again expedient justice. Have these people been held accountable? When a violent felon is wrongly released back into society, shouldn't those responsible be held accountable? When a defense attorney goes well beyond presenting factual evidence, in order to get his client that he know is guilty, off on a technicality or a lighter sentence, shouldn't he/she be held accountable? When so called "expert witnesses present inconclusive or incorrect information just to collect a fee, shouldn't they be held accountable? In our case, the psychiatrist who testified that inmate #230602 had some kind of mental illness so that he should get a lighter sentence, and then told our friends in the courthouse elevator, that inmate #230602 was very dangerous and should never be released, shouldn't he be held accountable?**

**Likewise, the Governor, Legislator and everyone in the criminal justice system should be held accountable when expediency, financial considerations and lack of accountability come before public safety. It is incumbent upon all of us to make sure that the criminal justice system serves the good and welfare of the public and not those in the system itself. It used to be said that if you don't live in the inner city, are not a minority and are not involved with drugs, you and your family will not be visited by violent crime. Statistics no longer show this to be valid.**

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**Many still believe this to be true. They think if they live in a fancy house in the suburbs, send their children to private schools and participate in many social, politic and civic groups, violent crime will not visit them. They are like the ostrich who, when threatened, hides its head in the sand only to leave its big body exposed. We can no longer be ostriches. Violent crime is spreading and affecting everyone.**

**It is incumbent on each of us to make sure those in the criminal justice system do everything possible to protect the good and welfare of our citizens. They must be held accountable for their actions when they fail to do their jobs to protect us. The horrific crimes which took the lives of Jennifer, Hayley & Michaela Petit, may have been prevented if those in the system had diligently done their jobs. The horrible deaths of those in the Petit Family, our Melanie, Elizabeth Carlson, Molly Bish, Megan Kanka, and the many others show that violent crime is blind.**

**Now is the time to hold the Governor, Legislature and those paid to protect our safety and our way of life, as guaranteed by our Constitution, accountable. Now is the time for all of us to come together to effect changes in the system so that we can feel reasonably safe in our homes. We must work together to make sure that the laws of this state are appropriate to protect our safety and, if not, work with the legislature to put valid ones in place. We need to hold those in the system accountable for their failures. Our society cannot afford to lose any more Jennifers, Hayleys, Michaelas, Melanies, Elizabeths, Mollys, Megans and all the rest of the young victims lost to violent crime. What is the value of a young life? They were our future. The time to act is now!! Thank you.**