

Governor Christie Signs Bipartisan Legislation to Increase the Rights of Crime Victims in New Jersey

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Alex DeCroce's Law Honors Late Assembly Leader's Commitment to the Victims' Rights Movement

Trenton, NJ – Taking action to further protect the rights of crime victims, Governor Chris Christie today signed "Alex DeCroce's Law," which updates and strengthens New Jersey's existing Crime Victim's Bill of Rights. Approved by voters in 1991, the present day law enumerates certain constitutional protections for crime victims and their families, including the right to be treated with dignity and compassion by the criminal justice system, the right to be advised of case progress and final disposition and the right to make an in-person statement directly to the sentencing court.

"Alex DeCroce was a tireless leader and advocate of victims' rights who is still dearly missed in Trenton today," said Governor Christie. "A pioneer of the modern victims' rights movement in the Garden State, Alex's commitment was born out of his sense of fairness and his huge heart for those who had suffered a great personal loss. Today, I am proud to sign this bill, appropriately named in Alex's memory, to secure the rights and fair, compassionate treatment of victims and their families. This law furthers my commitment, Alex's commitment and that of the Legislature to ensure that crime victims in our state have every protection they deserve."

Early on in his legislative career, DeCroce sponsored the Victim's Rights Amendment which New Jersey voters approved in 1991. This landmark amendment to the New Jersey Constitution guaranteed the rights of crime victims.

"Alex championed this legislation because of his sensitivity to the pain and anguish felt by victims and their families," said Assemblywoman BettyLou DeCroce. "He devoted much of his public and personal life to building a coalition of many constituencies that understood the trauma endured by crime victims and I am proud to help finish the work he pioneered."

The changes in A-2380 address gaps in victim treatment as identified by victims' advocates and update certain provisions affected by case law. Current law has not been updated since 2001.

These revisions include:

- the expansion and clarification that victims have the right to be free from harassment and abuse by any person, including the defendant or any person acting in the support of or on behalf of the defendant;
- the assurance that medical assistance is provided to the victim if it relates to the incident and is consistent with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act of 1971;
- timely notification ensuring victims of case progress and scheduling of court proceedings;
- notification of the release or escape of the defendant;
- the expansion of rights to confer with a prosecutor's representative and to be kept informed;
- consideration of victims' statements in pre-trial determinations and plea agreements and the right to be present at open court proceedings, unless sequestered;
- allowing victims' families in homicide prosecutions to display pictures of the victim during sentencing statements.

The bill becomes effective 60 days after enactment.

Sponsors of the legislation include Assemblymembers Gordon M. Johnson (D-Bergen), Robert Schroeder (R-Bergen, Passaic), Holly Schepisi (R-Bergen, Passaic), BettyLou DeCroce (R-Essex, Morris, Passaic) and Ruben J. Ramos, Jr., (D-Hudson)

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