

Helen's Law takes vital step closer

- bill to introduce 'Helen's Law' enters Parliament today (15 October 2019)
- criminals who withhold information on victims could spend longer behind bars
- new law could also block paedophiles from release

'Helen's 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.

It will place a legal duty on the Parole Board to consider the cruelty of killers who refuse to give the location of a victim's remains when assessing their release.

The Bill will also now apply to paedophiles who take indecent images of children but refuse to disclose their identity and could therefore see them locked away for longer.

'Helen's Law' is the government's latest move to overhaul the criminal justice system – following steps to recruit 20,000 new police officers, invest £2.5 billion in prisons and review sentencing to protect the public from the most violent and sexual offenders.

Justice Secretary & Lord Chancellor Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP said:

Innocent families should never have their grief compounded by offenders who refuse to disclose information on their victims.

Not only will this Bill help prevent the torture of families in Marie's situation but we also believe evil sexual offenders who refuse to identify victims should face longer behind bars.

Helen's Law should send another clear signal that under this government the most violent and sexual offenders can expect to serve sentences that reflect the true severity of their crimes.

The Prisoners (disclosure of information about victims) Bill was announced yesterday (14 October 2019) in the Queen's Speech and is one of the first pieces of legislation to be introduced in the new parliamentary session.

Parole Board guidance is already clear that offenders who withhold information may still pose a risk to the public and could therefore face longer in prison. 'Helen's Law' will for the first time make it a legal requirement to consider the withholding of information when making a decision on whether to release an offender.

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 earlier this 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.