

Why We Should Keep Life Without Parole Options For Killers

Opinion Editorial by MAPA President Daniel K. Knight

Michael Taylor was hiding in the girls' bathroom at school while he waited for her to come in. It wasn't the first time. He had to transfer from one school to another because he was caught hiding in the girls' bathroom. He was more than six feet tall and weighed well over 200 pounds. School officials at his new school did not know the reason for his transfer. After just a few weeks at his new school, Taylor did the unthinkable. His tiny victim entered the bathroom. She was 15 years old, but barely five feet tall and maybe 100 pounds. Michael Taylor was there, waiting. He grabbed her, beat her unmercifully and forcibly raped her. He continued to beat her until she was unconscious and tried to stuff her into a toilet.

Taylor was 15-years-old when he killed in St. Louis County. He was certified by a judge to be tried as an adult. A jury convicted him of first-degree murder. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. While in prison, he sexually assaulted and murdered his cellmate. He was sentenced to death for that murder.

Because he was under 18-years-old, some people want us to think that Michael Taylor and others like him are mere children who should evade full responsibility for their adult actions. But the truth is that Michael Taylor and others like him are dangerous murderers who must be held accountable to ensure the safety of us all.

In 2012, the United States Supreme Court ruled that possible sentences for killers who commit murder when they are less than 18-years-old must have a range of punishment that includes options before they can be sentenced to life without parole. Missouri's statute on first-degree murder needs to be fixed to comply with this mandate. The clear answer is to expand the range of punishment and create additional options to life without parole. For years, the Missouri General Assembly has failed to do this, forcing families of murder victims to hang in limbo.

Thanks to the efforts of Senator Bob Dixon and others who stand with crime victims and public safety, we are on the verge of righting this wrong.

Yet, there are those who want to take away the ability of citizen jurors and judges to consider a full range of punishment, including the option of life in prison without parole for murderers like Michael Taylor.

They call these killers "children" in order to appeal to our natural human sympathies. But make no mistake, some murderers under the age of 18 are too dangerous to ever walk among us in society again.

We are not talking about accidental deaths or bad choices made in the heat of the moment. We are talking exclusively about people convicted of first degree murder—an intentional murder committed after deliberation. These "children" chose to take a human life, often in unspeakably brutal and vicious ways. These killers have already been certified by a judge to stand trial as adults. They have been found guilty by a jury of 12 impartial citizens who heard the evidence and unanimously found them guilty of first-degree murder, rejecting all other lesser options.

We trust our juries and our judges to make the right decisions about guilt. We should trust them with a full range of punishment for society's worst killers. Hopefully, the General Assembly will make the right choice and keep life without parole as an option for punishing Missouri's most dangerous murderers and protecting its innocent citizens.