

U.S. Rep. Michael T. McCaul
Statement for the Record
December 8, 2021

I urge you to support H.R. 3359, the *Homicide Victims' Families Rights Act of 2021*, to give more rights to the families of federal homicide victims.

Thirty years ago this week, on December 6, 1991, a quadruple murder at a yogurt shop in Austin, Texas, claimed the lives of four teenage girls, 13-year-old Amy Ayers, 17-year-old Eliza Thomas, 17-year-old Jennifer Harbison, and her 15-year-old sister Sarah Harbison. After Austin firefighters responded to reports of a burning structure, all four girls were discovered in the torched yogurt shop where they had been tied up, stacked on top of each other, and each shot in the head. Evidence indicated some had been sexually assaulted. Tragically, despite years of investigative efforts, numerous rewards offered, arrests and overturned convictions, these murders remain unsolved.

As a father of five and a former federal prosecutor, it is unimaginable to go without an answer as to why a loved one was taken so suddenly. The families and loved ones of homicide victims deserve closure by identifying the perpetrator, and H.R. 3359 may help provide that for federal cases that have gone cold. That is why this legislation is so important. It gives families like these the tools to work with law enforcement to pursue justice on behalf of their loved one.

H.R. 3359 will give a family member, or a similarly situated person, of a homicide victim under federal law the right to have their loved one's case file reviewed once the case has gone cold for a period of three years. If the federal investigator feels it would lead to probative leads, a full reinvestigation would be conducted. The bill would also require the federal government to notify the family member and similarly situated persons of their rights and to provide updates to them on any cold case review. Finally, it would collect data on the problem of case cases generally.

Sometimes it just takes another set of eyes to discover a fact that was overlooked or using a new test that was not available when the homicide was first investigated to find the offender. I hope that H.R. 3359 will serve as a model for states and localities so that all victims' families can have more hope the offender will be caught, regardless of the governmental level prosecuting the case. We can and must do better for the families of the victims of homicides and I urge you to support H.R. 3359.