

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM, AND HOMELAND SECURITY

FROM *MIRANDA* TO *GIDEON*: A CALL FOR PRETRIAL REFORM

MARCH 26, 2021

STATEMENT OF
JUNE GROSS-RODGERS
CHAIRWOMAN, VICTIMS RIGHTS REFORM COUNCIL

Good Morning Chairman Jerrold Nadler, Ranking Member Jim Jordan, Chairwoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Ranking Member Andy Biggs, and distinguished Committee members. My name is June Rodgers. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today as a victim of bail reform.

I live in Millville, New Jersey, and bail reform was implemented in my state on January 1st of 2017. My nightmare began in April of 2017. Jules Black, a convicted felon, was taken into custody once again for gun possession, and because of bail reform, he was released back onto the street.

While in custody, he was given a risk assessment test which asked him questions such as: can you afford bail, will you show up for all court appearances, and if you were released, do you promise not to commit another crime. As a result, the algorithm deemed him to be of low risk and safe to release. The presiding judge in the matter was compelled to release him because of the laws of bail reform. Four days later, Mr. Black gunned my son Christian Rodgers down in broad daylight. Since then, Mr. Black has accumulated more charges in this case by using his girlfriend to threaten the eye witness and the lives of her children. She now lives in fear of her life.

These are the types of people who are benefitting from bail reform. Had it not been for bail reform, it is my belief that my son Christian would still be alive today. It is very disturbing that the policymakers are touting the success of cashless bail, but no one is considering the victims or their families in all of this. I can not express enough the pain and the anguish that my entire family is suffering from losing such a kind and loving person as Christian was. He was well-loved by almost everyone who knew him. It still pains me deeply whenever his two small sons often ask where he is and when he is coming home. I myself still have nightmares about seeing the picture of his lifeless body lying on the ground that someone had posted on Facebook. I was distraught when I found out that this all happened because of bail reform. I went to my local politicians about this issue, and one of them had the nerve to refer to Christian as being collateral damage. This angered me to no end.

The very people who say they care about poor black communities are only concerned about this paid political agenda. Politicians are telling us that cash bail is unfair to us poor black people, but I'm here to say that not being able to live in peace is more unfair. We are not safe to walk down the street in the middle of the day. As I continue my fight for the victims of bail reform, I would like to invite the policymakers to join me in having a further common sense dialog about bail reform in our local communities, not just here in our nation's capital. And to please include the people who will be most affected by these laws.

Once again, thank you for inviting me to speak on this issue that means so much to me. I look forward to answering your questions.