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Couple advocates victims' rights

articles

by Marcus E. Howard
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Renée Rondeau, right, appears with her sister, Lisa. After Renée's 1994 murder, her parents, Gordon and Elaine, have become dedicated advocates in the movement for greater crime victims' rights. Staff/Special

EAST COBB — If she was alive this year, the daughter of Gordon and Elaine Rondeau of east Cobb would have been 48 years old.

Sadly, Renée Rondeau, described as an outgoing and generous person, was murdered while living in Chicago in 1994. Since then, Gordon and Elaine have become dedicated advocates in the movement for greater crime victims' rights.

The couple is asking the public to contact their members of Congress to urge them to sign on as co-sponsors of a proposed Victims' Rights Amendment, H.J. Res. 106, to the U.S. Constitution. Advocates argue that crime victims have virtually no legal standing in the Constitution.

In March, U.S. Reps. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.) and Jim Costa (D-Calif.) introduced the joint resolution. Thirteen other representatives have since signed on as co-sponsors. It was then referred to the House Judiciary Committee, which must consider it before possibly sending it to the full House or Senate as a whole.

Gordon said the proposal simply calls on Congress to put together a victims' rights bill that can be voted on. He said the three primary rights advocates have urged for are a right to be regularly informed about a case, a right to be heard via a statement in court, and a right to be present throughout legal proceedings.

"We victims, as survivors of a victim of homicide, knew nothing," said Elaine of her daughter's case that required frequent trips to Illinois.

"We had no help until the perpetrators were arrested. For six months we were on our own."

Renée had moved to the Windy City to work for Rainbow PUSH Coalition and Chicago Cares. She was walking through a neighborhood when she was murdered by two drug addicts in a robbery on Halloween night in 1994, said Elaine. She said the perpetrators were later convicted to life without parole sentences.

"She would have helped them because they were the very kind of people she was trying to help when she was working in the inner city," said Elaine. "She died for \$300."

The national movement for passage of the constitutional amendment has been led by the National Victims' Constitutional Amendment Passage, National Organization for Victim Assistance and Force 100.

However critics, including prosecuting attorneys and legal scholars, have long held deep concerns about such a proposal. They've said that involving crime victims and their their survivors in the inner workings of the justice system could possibly compromise the principal purpose of a criminal proceeding, which is to determine the guilt or innocence of the accused.

The Rondeaus have been deeply involved in the advocacy of victims' rights and crime prevention. In 1997, the couple founded the Renée Olubunmi Rondeau Peace Foundation, which looks to find solutions to crime problems. They said support for the amendment from some local political leaders has been tepid, but they hope to change that with more awareness.

"People like to turn their heads and say, 'Too bad it happened to Trayvon Martin, JonBenét

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Ramsey and Nicole Brown Simpson,” said Elaine. “Crime does not discriminate and you can end up in this boat at any time.”

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