

NEWS

Office of U.S. Rep. Henry J. Hyde

House Judiciary Committee

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Hyde Urges Enactment of Crime Victims' Rights Law

(WASHINGTON) - U.S. Rep. Henry J. Hyde (R-IL) on Wednesday urged that Congress adopt measures granting victims of crime important new rights.

"Violent criminals damage and destroy the lives of innocent victims every day in our country. But what about the victims? Do they have any rights? Well, they do not have any that are protected by the federal constitution. That is what we must do our best to change," Hyde said.

Hyde, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, has introduced both a constitutional amendment and a corresponding implementing statute designed to spell out for the first time specific rights for crime victims. Which measure is successful in Congress will depend, Hyde said, on a number of factors including the strength of presidential support for victims' rights legislation.

Both measures provide crime victims a number of new federal legal rights including: 1) a right to receive notice of public proceedings related to the crime; 2) a right to be heard, if present, and to submit a written statement at any proceeding to determine the release of the criminal defendant from custody, to accept any negotiated plea agreement, at the sentencing of the defendant and at any parole proceeding; 3) a right to consideration for the safety of the victim prior to determining any release of the defendant from custody, and other rights

"Constitutional rights for persons accused of crimes exist not to protect the guilty, but to protect innocent persons who are falsely accused," Hyde said. "Crime victims are innocents dragged into the criminal justice system against their will just like the falsely accused. These victims should be provided specific, defined rights under the federal constitution," he added.

Hyde made his remarks at a judiciary committee hearing that included supporting testimony from Attorney General Janet Reno and advocates for victims' rights.

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