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In wake of killer's release, a call for reform

By [SANDY SEOANE, Valley Breeze Staff Writer](#)

WOONSOCKET - The early release of a man convicted of the 1999 killing of a Woonsocket woman has led one organization to demand reform of the state criminal justice system and a greater adherence to mandated sentences for crimes of murder.

Alliance for Safe Communities has started a petition titled "Murder by the Numbers" on [change.org](#), condemning a system that allows individuals charged with murder to be eligible for parole after serving only one third of their sentences.

"We feel they should serve at least half of their sentence before they're up for their first parole," said Carolyn Medeiros, executive director of ASC.

While supporters say it is far from the only case of injustice to take place in the state this year, the November 2013 release of Alfred Brissette prompted the recent call for reform.

"It is not uncommon, and has become somewhat of a norm, that we are seeing increasing numbers of murderers released in 15 years or less," the petition states. Brissette was charged in 2004 with conspiracy for his role in the death on 38-year-old Jeannette Descoteaux of Woonsocket. Court records from the trial document a random, brutal attack planned by Brissette with the help of another man, Marc Girard. Brissette reportedly lured Descoteaux into the woods in Burrillville and hit her in the head with a lug wrench. Descoteaux died of her injuries and the men dug a hole and buried her body.



After pleading no contest to second-degree murder, Brissette was sentenced to 35 years, but became eligible for parole after serving just 13. He was released after a decision by the Parole Board.

"That's the value of a life: 13 years," said Medeiros. "There's something terribly wrong with that."

The decision has received criticism from Rhode Island Brotherhood of Correctional Officers and the attorney general's office along with ASC, a nonprofit group focused on public safety.

"He killed just for the thrill of the kill. How scary is that? And then he gets out in 13 years," Medeiros said of Brissette.

Brissette now lives in a halfway house on Pemberton Street in Providence.

In 2013, state Sen. Leonidas Raptakis sponsored a bill that would have required individuals convicted of first- or second-degree murder to serve at least half of their sentence before qualifying for a parole hearing. The bill was unanimously passed by the Senate, but died in the House of Representatives.

"The House Judiciary is a place where we see tough crime bills killed," said Medeiros, adding that she does expect the bill to get reintroduced this year.

Medeiros points out that the need for reform extends beyond the Rhode Island borders.

"We send these people out of state. This isn't just impacting Rhode Island," she said, pointing to Bradley Kryla, who was convicted of bludgeoning a woman to death with a tombstone in 1994, but now lives in Florida. "I don't think Floridians would find it amusing that we let murderers out after only 13 years."

Parole board members have defended their decision in Brissette's case, saying that he was only released once an appropriate plan was in place, which covered the details of his transition back into the community. Brissette, they say, was never disciplined during his time at the ACI.

For some, it seems, that's not enough. Federal guidelines, they point out, require that murderers to serve up to 85 percent of their sentence before their first parole review.

"Rhode Islanders do not simply want, but rather they demand 'truth in sentencing' moving forward this year," the petition states. "The life taken in a murder is of more value than 15 years."

The petition can be found at www.change.org .