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Tong proposes greater sharing of criminal justice information

Democratic State Rep. William Tong recently announced legislation to create "The Shield," a state-of-the-art criminal justice information system that will address information sharing failures highlighted by the murders of three members of the Petit family in Cheshire earlier this year.

Rep. Tong, whose 147th District includes western New Canaan, was appointed by Judiciary Chairmen Sen. Andrew McDonald of Stamford and Rep. Michael Lawlor of East Haven to lead the effort to revamp the State's criminal justice information system. He has private-sector experience as a management consultant and lawyer, and in the field of electronic discovery and document management systems.

Rep. Tong's proposal has been submitted as Section 12 of "An Act Concerning Home Invasion, Career Criminals, Community Supervision and Information Sharing Resources," submitted by Judiciary chairmen, which aims to strengthen jail sentences and provide the necessary resources for law enforcement to keep tabs on recently paroled individuals.

"We need to build 'The Shield' to ensure that no family is ever put at risk again because criminal justice and law enforcement agencies failed to share information," Rep. Tong said. "The failures that may have contributed to the Petit family tragedy were inexcusable, and I believe that building 'The Shield' is one of the first things we must do to keep our families safe."

Rep. Lawlor emphasized the central importance of information sharing.

"Our state needs a central, state-of-the-art electronic database so front-line officials can have immediate access to police reports, pre-sentence investigations, sentencing transcripts and prison, parole and probation files," Rep. Lawlor said. "'The Shield' will go a long way to ensuring that state and local police, the Office of the Chief State's Attorney, the Judicial Branch, Department of Correction, Department of Public Safety, and Board of Pardons and Paroles will be able to share critical information with one another."

"The Shield" will include an Internet-based central, integrated criminal justice tracking and information system with up-to-date, real-time information about present and former offenders, and analytical tools that aid in criminal case assessment and plea bargain analysis as well as parole, pardon and release decisions. It will also empower all criminal justice agencies and personnel to collaborate and share notes and with respect to specific offenders, and to make forecasts concerning recidivism and the likelihood that specific offenders will re-offend. Where appropriate, "The Shield" will be available to the public to ensure transparency in the criminal justice process.

A public hearing on "The Shield" and the Lawlor-McDonald bill, in addition to 13 others proposed by various groups and state legislators, will take place at 1 p.m. on November 27 in room 2E of the Legislative Office Building.

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[Top of Page](#)

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