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## New law ensures victims have say

By Wayne Brown, Linda Brown, Kellie Wiggins, Claudia Barnes, Jessalyn Dorsey

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Gov. Sonny Perdue will sign Senate Bill 151 on the steps of the Douglas County Courthouse Wednesday morning as he supports and recognizes the importance of victims' rights.

Senate Bill 151 changes the law involving victim impact statements, affording the victim or the victim's family members the opportunity to describe the impact of the crime on their lives. Having participated in the judicial process, we realized the need for changes in the law.


The current guideline for delivering a statement says that the victims must show little to no emotion. Many people already fear speaking in public; then added to this pressure is placing the victims in front of the defendant, the judge and the jury, amplifying their anxiety. Absolutely no one should lose the right to speak on behalf of his or her loved one because of emotions or fear of causing a mistrial.

Legislators unanimously voted to ensure that victims and immediate family members would always have the right to give a statement, and if unable to read them, that they will be afforded the opportunity to present them in audio or video form. This ensures that each victim will have the right to be heard in a way that is most fitting for him or her.

Wayne & Linda Brown, parents of Cobb County murder victim Lori Brown. Kellie Wiggins, sister of Douglas County murder victim Marie Richards. Claudia Barnes, widow of Fulton County murder victim Judge Rowland Barnes. Jessalyn Dorsey, mother of Cobb County murder victim Terrence Greene.

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