

County Board Green Party candidate proposes new law to protect victims of crime from media

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – Joshua Young is running on the Green Party Platform this time for a position to represent District 10 on the Madison County Board.

Young has previously run as a write-in candidate during the 2017 Alton Mayoral Election. This time, he is running against Democrat Bruce Malone and Republican Tim Smith. He said he wants to run in a manner to bring bipartisan support to attain sponsorship for many progressive laws already in the Illinois General Assembly, such as House Bill (HB) 0736, which he believes will get money to small business creation in lower social demographics, Senate Bill (SB) 1688, which he said will make it easier for those with backgrounds to get professional licenses, and HB0514, which allows filing of a petition to immediately seal arrests and charges if a case has been dismissed or acquitted.

Outside of these existing bills, however, Young has one of his own in mind, which has been sourced from media reactions to a handful of local tragedies – most recently the murder of Keron Hickman in Alton. After the death of Hickman, his criminal history was published in at least one local publication. Young wants this practice of publishing the criminal histories of crime victims following that crime to cease, so he has drafted a proposal for sponsorship for the support of victims of violent crimes media protection law.

In the draft, he said the purpose of the law would be to “further value and protect victims' rights, further ensuring a fair and impartial preliminary and judicial process.” Young stated he would like to include this law in the 775 ILCS 5 “Human Rights Act” as well as the 725 ILCS 120 “Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses Act.”

If Young's sponsorship is taken into consideration and a bill is drafted toward a law, members of the media would refrain from publishing any victim(s) of violent crimes criminal history. The criminal history of a victim or victims, which is currently public information through various agencies, would be placed into a protective category until a preliminary investigation and disposition of alleged criminal act upon said victim(s) has concluded.

According to the draft, this would “further protect victim(s) from discrimination and impartial influence which may impede the preliminary and judicial process. That publication of the criminal history of a victim(s) of violent crimes by any media or media-related source(s) be made a civil violation.”

“The protection of victims of violent crimes from the media who utilize a reporting method which affects many families and is considered unprofessional, over-sensationalizing, discriminative, demonizing and often targeting inappropriately against the minority demographics,” Young said in the draft. “A reporting method that impedes

the preliminary investigative process in aspects of solving the crime(s) and the influence of possible juror selectees. A reporting method that when there is an unfortunate loss of life; a violation of a family's last rites; which show no compassion in regards to humanities and civilities.”

Young said this movement has the support of at least one candidate seeking state-level office as well as the East Alton and Alton police chiefs. The East Alton Police Chief did not return a request for comment, but Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons said he believes Young's proposal holds some merit.

Simmons said he was against the media posting the criminal histories of victims, especially when those criminal histories have little or nothing to do with the crime's motive. He said such actions by the media often do more than harm the surviving family members, they also impede on some investigations. Simmons said he was a huge proponent of the freedom of the press, but believed such reporting, which he said is done by all media outlets, is unnecessary, especially just after the crimes are committed and the family is still grieving.