

[<< Back](#)



"Widman Act" aims to close probation loophole

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TALLAHASSEE: New legislation named in honor of Officer Andrew Widman would close a loophole that lets violent offenders out of jail.

Florida state senator Lizbeth Benacquisto and Florida House member Matt Caldwell are sponsoring the legislation, which will change the rules on probation violation.

The legislators say currently, violent criminals released on probation who are arrested on new charges don't have that violation of probation taken into account when setting bond on the new arrest.

They say the new law would allow law enforcement to hold violent offenders until an expedited violation of probation hearing can be held prior to the first appearance on the new charge.

Widman was killed by Abel Arango in July 2008 as he attempted to break up a fight between Arango and his girlfriend.

Arango, who was out on probation, had been arrested but bonded out before he could be charged with violation of probation.

There was a warrant for his arrest when he shot Widman.

Arango was killed by Fort Myers police officers in a shootout shortly after.

Widman left behind a wife and three young children.

The Andrew Widman Act is Senate Bill 844 and House Bill 575.

A similar law passed the House last year but went nowhere in the Senate. It was sponsored by then -Representative Nick Thompson, who is now a judge.



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