

## **Editorials: Andrew Widman law Criminal tracking system shouldn't wait any longer**

Staff Reports

Saturday, March 19, 2011

Third time's a charm?

After failing for two years, can the Florida Legislature do the right thing and enact a better tracking system for criminal suspects making their way through our court system?

The data and technology are there and ready to be put to work.

Two freshmen lawmakers, who were not around for the first two tries, aim to say "yes."

Matt Caldwell and Lizbeth Benacquisto, who represent parts of Lee County, want judges to know the full backgrounds of suspects who come before them.

An habitual offender who slipped in and out of the system — unbeknownst to judges in Lee County — was on the street in 2008 and killed Fort Myers police officer Andrew Widman.

The killer was not just a garden-variety hoodlum. He was on probation for armed robbery when he was arrested for selling drugs.

That was a probation violation, making him eligible for jail. He even showed up as ordered for a court hearing, but a judge let him go on bond because the judge did not know of his record.

The glitch should have raised a public outcry across the state. Instead, the case fell victim to short memories — and tight budgets.

Better late than never, Caldwell and Benacquisto say.

Good for them.

And good for veteran lawmakers from the Southwest Florida delegation who network with colleagues across the state to get this job done this year.

Judges have to know who is standing before them. They have to know who poses the most grave danger to law-abiding citizens — and police officers.

It's that simple, and that important.



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