

**Victim's mother fighting 'Tyler's Law' legislation
By BRIAN HAWKINS/Starkville Daily News**

Ann Cash is a mother on a mission.

Cash, whose son, Joseph T. "Joey" Fulgham was shot to death on May 10, 2003, says she is fighting against a bill pending in the state Legislature that could see the teenager convicted in her son's murder go free if it's passed.

House Bill 1090 - commonly referred to as "Tyler's Law" after Tyler Edmonds, who was convicted in July 2004 of Joey Fulgham's murder - is currently pending before a state Senate committee after already being passed by the House of Representatives almost two weeks ago.

The bill, authored by State Rep. George Flaggs, D-Vicksburg, will allow trial judges to review individual situations for juvenile offenders.

The bill revamps how juveniles charged with capital crimes - those offenses which carry a penalty of up to a life sentence in prison - are handled from the time they are arrested, how they are processed through the court system, how they are sentenced and could provide for previous juvenile offenders now serving prison time to have their cases and sentences revisited by a judge.

Cash says the bill will amount to virtually no punishment for juveniles who commit crimes like murder.

"It's going to show anybody that a crime can be committed like that and then get a slap on the hand. What does the family of a victim - a family like mine - get out of this? They don't even get peace of mind out of this any more," Cash said.

"I as a mother who has lost such a dear son, feel that if this bill is passed, it will only be showing murderers such as Tyler Edmonds that even if they commit murder, go on trial, are found guilty by 12 members of the jury, that it's no big deal. Being under 17 years of age, all they will get is a few years and then they would be out of prison and free to continue their life as they please," Cash said.

During Edmonds' trial, numerous questions were raised by defense attorneys about his age at the time of Joey Fulgham's slaying - Edmonds was 13 at the time - and whether he may have been subject to undue influence both by Kristi Fulgham prior to the crime and by authorities during the investigation that followed.

The Mississippi Appeals Court recently denied Edmonds' appeal of his conviction, rejecting all 14 claims raised by his defense team, including contentions that his confession to the crime was involuntary and that Judge Jim Kitchens, who presided over his trial, should have allowed expert testimony about the frequency of false confessions by juveniles.

Edmonds maintains Kristi Fulgham coerced him to falsely confess to the murder, though Appeals Court justices, citing interview transcripts and

witness testimony, ruled otherwise.

Some juveniles like Edmonds charged with murder should be given a second chance, Flagg has said previously. But Cash and others - District Attorney Forrest Allgood among them - say that passage of House Bill 1090 will keep the pain crime victims feel from healing.

Her son's children - Tyler Fulgham, now 10, and Darian Fulgham, now 8 - will not experience their father's love again, Cash said.

"What about truth and justice for Joey's life? Tyler's family can come and visit him. I and my family have only a grave to visit. Only in heaven will we ever be together again," Cash said. "I understand where his mother and others are coming from, but a slap on the hand is not going to make it right. I still don't have closure. If they pass this bill, it's going to open up more wounds - wounds that will stay open and never heal."

Cash said the evidence of the trial and investigation shows that Edmonds was involved in her son's death.

"Tyler knew what he was doing. He talked to a couple of people about what was going on a couple of days before Joey was killed. I feel like he got exactly what he deserved, and we'll get some peace of mind if they'll just leave it alone and not pass this bill in the Legislature," Cash said.

"I'll never get to see my son again. I just hope nobody has to walk in my shoes."