

# New NH law keeps murder case liars on the hook

By DAVID TIRRELL-WYSOCKI  
The Associated Press

CONCORD — Renny Cushing is convinced a former New Hampshire state trooper got away with murder. So the state representative from Hampton sponsored a law that will have people looking over their shoulders for the rest of their lives if they've lied about a murder or helped cover one up.

The law removes the statute of limitations, or deadline, for when people can be prosecuted for crimes related to murders. They include such infractions as falsifying evidence, threatening witnesses or lying.

Cushing said he hopes the

law will become a model for other states. Relatives of murder victims — including himself — yearn for justice, he said. And new technology is helping to uncover the truth years after crimes were committed.

There is no limit on charging someone with murder, but laws across the country commonly let people off the hook after a few years for lesser offenses such as backing a false alibi of a murder suspect. That will no longer be the case in New Hampshire, starting Jan. 1.

"It's one thing if you give false information about somebody stealing a bike, it's another thing if you give false information about somebody stealing

somebody's life," Cushing said.

Prosecutors do not envision jailing a lot of people who obstructed investigations, but they hope the lifelong threat of prison will prompt some to tell what they know.

"It gives us another tool to use with witnesses who are reluctant and may act as a deterrent to people if they think that if they can withhold information and enough time goes by, that they'll be immune from prosecution," said Senior Assistant Attorney General Jeffery Strelzin. "Now they'll know they won't be. So there will be some incentive there hopefully for people to be more cooperative and more truthful."

Cushing said the law also could help put killers in prison, at least for short sentences. For example, prosecutors can use the law if investigators discover a murder suspect tampered with evidence, but they couldn't find enough evidence to bring a murder charge.

Cushing said he was inspired by the case of Janet Dow and her stepson, Stephen. Their bodies were found in their burned car in northern New Hampshire in December 1982.

Investigators accepted an explanation from Janet's husband, Richard, a local police officer and former state trooper, that the two had sped away from their Thornton home and

crashed, likely igniting an open container of gasoline he said the son had placed in the car.

A decade later, authorities discredited Dow's account, saying they believed the Dows were murdered and the crash staged. Richard Dow was the target of the investigation, but the attorney general said there was not enough evidence to charge anyone.

Strelzin said he couldn't comment on specific open cases, but Cushing said the new law would have helped.

"When police subsequently uncovered the fact it was a homicide instead of an accident, Dick Dow could not be prosecuted for what were obvious

false statements made to law enforcement," Cushing said.

Cushing said personal experience also drove him. His father was murdered on his doorstep in 1988 by a police officer neighbor with a grudge. The officer then consoled the family as he pretended to help track down the killer.

"You never lose your longing for justice," Cushing said. "I don't believe people should be allowed to get away with murder."

A few states have similar laws. Pennsylvania's law sets no time limit on prosecuting felony cases connected to first- or second-degree murder.