

## Veto No. 1984-10

SB 1361

December 26, 1984

To the Honorable, the Senate  
of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

I have before me Senate Bill 1361, Printer's No.2484, which, as originally introduced, provides for rights of child victims and witnesses of criminal acts, authorizes videotaping of such children and the use of dolls as testimonial aids, and prohibits media release of names of child victims. In its present form, the bill would also establish mandatory minimum prison sentences for robberies committed against the elderly.

I support and endorse those provisions which would protect child victims and witnesses from additional trauma, making it easier for them to provide testimony against criminals who prey on children. I also support and endorse provisions of this bill relating to mandatory sentencing for crimes against the elderly, which would deter or incarcerate those who would assault our senior citizens.

Unfortunately, at the last minute in the legislative process, an amendment was inserted into this legislation which causes me to withhold my approval of the bill. That amendment, which was never discussed at a public hearing or examined by any legislative committee, would make major changes in laws regarding sentencing, incarceration and parole of criminals convicted of sex offenses. It would increase the number of persons referred to the State prisons for diagnosis and classification by 1,400, and force up to 700 additional prisoners into our State corrections system at a time when it is simply not equipped to handle them without undermining our ability to provide adequate programs and conditions for those who are already there. I believe it would be preferable to continue to handle persons convicted of sex offenses, in most cases, at the local level.

Because of this amendment to what is otherwise desirable legislation, I must hereby publicly proclaim and file with the Secretary of the Commonwealth my disapproval of Senate Bill 1361, Printer's No.2484. I urge the new General Assembly to promptly pass and send to me for approval legislation which includes the provisions of this bill relating to child victims and witnesses and crimes committed against the elderly. In the meantime, I urge courts throughout the State to use their existing authority under the Rules of Criminal Procedure to use videotaped depositions and other mechanisms to assist child victims and witnesses during criminal prosecutions.

DICK THORNBURGH