



Justice reform hailed

JOSH BURROWS

THE widow of Yalgoo farmer Bill Rowe, who died after he was struck with a cricket bat at Sunset Beach last Christmas, has praised changes to sentencing laws.

State Parliament last week repealed Truth in Sentencing laws — legislation which had made it compulsory for a judge to reduce the jail term given to Mathew Roy McDonald, the man convicted of Mr Rowe's manslaughter. McDonald was sentenced to five year's jail.

Truth in Sentencing, introduced by former Attorney General Jim McGinty, made it mandatory for sentences to be reduced by one third in anticipation of remissions which would normally have to be earned in

prison.

Mr Rowe's widow, Ellen, said she was relieved and pleased MPs had repealed the legislation.

"Hopefully this will be a prelude in restoring the public's confidence in good governance and the Criminal Justice System of WA," she said.

Geraldton MLA Ian Blayney said all political parties understood the importance of the Bill after sentencing in the Rowe case.

Local MP Brian Ellis said 8000 people had signed a Facebook site calling for the mandatory reduction to be abolished — an indication of public sentiment on the issue.

The Department of Public Prosecutions is reviewing McDon-

ald's sentence. If the DPP moves to appeal — and if that appeal is successful — the judge will be required to extend McDonald's sentence by one third, in addition to any extra time added to the original sentence as a result of the appeal.

But the new legislation does not enable the DPP to appeal purely on the basis of having the one third reduction removed.

The new legislation may also have implications in the case of a man accused of the murder of Geraldton charity worker Joe Hollomby. If found guilty, 49-year-old Eric Peterson would face additional jail time. Mr Peterson's court hearing is scheduled for January 14.