

Stop outrageous lawsuits against crime victims

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It's bad enough that Larry Shandola gunned down Paula Henry's husband, Robert, in a Tacoma parking lot, then tormented her for five years as authorities sought enough evidence to get him convicted in 2001.

But now, as he serves a 31-year sentence for the 1995 killing, Shandola has found a way to keep on hurting Henry. He's suing her, two of her friends and a victim's advocate for \$100,000 each, alleging that they violated his privacy rights and inflicted emotional distress.

The lawsuit is outrageous, but it's accomplishing exactly what Shandola probably hopes it would do: allow him to continue inflicting pain and suffering from behind prison walls.

Even if the lawsuit is thrown out of court, which we sincerely hope happens, he will have forced the four defendants to spend money on attorney's fees – which could continue if he appeals the suit's dismissal.

Sure, Henry and the other defendants might be awarded damages if Shandola's lawsuit is deemed frivolous. What are the chances they'd ever collect? Shandola has nothing to lose by filing this lawsuit. If he fails to pay up, what's the worst that could happen? He's already in prison.

Shandola has also created additional anguish for Paula Henry by having her served at her home, in effect telling her he knew how to find her. She has since moved out of fear that this obviously disturbed man knew her whereabouts.

But Henry is resolved not to let what's happening to her happen to another crime victim. She's working with attorney John Ladenburg Sr. – the former Pierce County executive – to make it

harder for convicts to sue victims or their family members. They and state Reps. David Sawyer and Steve Kirby, D-Tacoma, hope to attach a rider to existing legislation that would require convicts to get permission from a judge to file that kind of lawsuit.

Judicial consent would protect a convict's due process rights if the lawsuit had merits and would help protect people who have already been victimized from having to spend money defending themselves against a vindictive offender.

It would not be without precedent. In federal court, judges can order that convicted criminals not sue their victims or their family members.

If efforts to get this legislation passed in this session are unsuccessful, Sawyer and Kirby should push it next year. Otherwise, other criminals could be emboldened by Shandola's ability to continue victimizing people.

When you're stuck behind bars for what could be the rest of your life, this kind of litigation has entertainment value, if nothing else. Sadly, it's at the expense of people like Paula Henry, who have suffered enough