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Jail term seen as a mockery; LAW AND ORDER; TIMELINE

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Justice campaigner Norm Withers fears the man who bashed his elderly mother will reoffend, despite again being jailed.

The Deputy Mayor of Christchurch yesterday described Harry Goulding Houkamau's latest jail term as "limp", saying he could be paroled in just over two years.

In 1997, Houkamau beat Withers' mother, Nan, a Christchurch pensioner, while she looked after her son's menswear store. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

The attack prompted Norm Withers to organise a law-and-order referendum - supported by 92 per cent of New Zealand voters - calling for tougher sentencing for violent offenders.

In the Christchurch District Court yesterday, Houkamau, 36, was jailed for seven years for his part in an aggravated robbery and kidnapping in Richmond, Christchurch, in May.

Withers told The Press that seven years was not enough, as Houkamau could apply for parole one-third of the way through his sentence.

"It makes a mockery of the system, for me," he said. "It's (the sentence) pretty limp on that basis."

Asked if he feared Houkamau would reoffend, Withers replied: "I would, for the simple reason that he's had so many chances. I was hopeful, until this last arrest, that he might have turned the corner."

Withers supported rehabilitation, but believed some people could not be helped.

In sentencing Houkamau, Judge John Cadenhead said it was a bad case of aggravated robbery.

"It was an invasion of a dwelling and he's in the company of at least two other people," the judge said.

"The accused, when he got into the house, had a baton in his hand and extensive threats were made against the occupants."

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Houkamau told the victims he had a shotgun outside and if they tried to leave, they would be shot and their bodies dumped in the Waimakariri River.

Cadenhead said the ordeal must have been "quite terrifying".

Anna MacGougan, for the Crown, said Houkamau had 43 convictions, including for aggravated robbery and wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm in 1997 and another aggravated robbery in 1993.

Given his previous history, the risk of reoffending was high, she said.

Lawyer Steve Hembrow said his deaf client, who was abused as a child, had a partner and child now and wanted an ordinary life.

"There should be some acknowledgement of the four good years he's had."

Houkamau was sentenced to seven years for aggravated robbery and two years, to be served concurrently, for kidnapping.

Two other men, Shane Michael Ford Wakefield, 23, and Charles Bruce Wharekawa, 29, who worked in a security firm with Houkamau, were both sentenced to five years and one year on the same charges.

New Zealand First law-and-order spokesman Ron Mark said Houkamau's case was infuriating.

It showed parole did not rehabilitate offenders, he said.

A spokesman for Justice Minister Annette King said the minister was sympathetic to Withers' concerns, but the Government had toughened penalties.

"At the end of the day, a judge decides what the appropriate penalty should be," the spokesman said.

Labour's policy of offenders serving at least two-thirds of their sentence will not take effect until next year.

Under a National government, the worst repeat violent offenders would not get parole.

"The decision's made by the court, but if all these things applied he would not get parole," a spokesman for Simon Power, National's justice spokesman, said.

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TIMELINE

* 1997 - Nan Withers, 70, attacked while minding her son's menswear store. She required 75 stitches in her face and head, and suffered a fractured skull. Harry Goulding Houkamau sentenced to 10 years.

* 1999 - Norm Withers launches referendum calling for tougher sentencing for violent offenders, backed by 92 per cent of voters.

* 2002 - The Sentencing and Parole Reform Act is passed, allowing inmates sentenced to more than two years - except murderers - to become eligible for parole after one-third of their sentence. The non-parole period for the "worst types" of murder was raised from 10 years to 17.

* March 2002 - Nan Withers dies.

* 2006 - A Law Commission report says the 2002 changes undermined public confidence in sentencing.

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* September 2008 - Harry Goulding Houkamau sentenced to seven years for aggravated robber and kidnapping.

* 2009 - Sentencing Guidelines Council recommendations due to take effect, including Labour's plans to make prisoners serve two-thirds of their sentences. Or, should National be elected, the worst repeat violent offenders would not get parole.

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