

House Committee Passes Braley's Bill to Help Tortured American Citizens Pursue Justice

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Washington, DC - The House Judiciary Committee today passed Rep. Bruce Braley's (D-Iowa) Justice for Victims of Torture and Terrorism Act, which would allow American citizens who are tortured by foreign governments to be compensated for their injuries.

Braley's bill would effectively restore a provision in the Defense Authorization Act to ensure that the Iraqi government finally satisfies outstanding judgments and claims by American victims of Iraqi torture and terrorism.

Last December, President Bush vetoed the original version of the Defense Authorization Act over a provision that allowed American POWs tortured in Iraq to enforce valid judgments against the Iraqi government in US courts. Despite strong bipartisan support for the provision, the President's veto forced Congress to strip the language from the Defense bill to ensure its passage into law, effectively giving Iraq immunity for acts of torture committed while Iraq was a declared "state sponsor of terrorism." The Third Geneva Convention expressly forbids action by the United States to absolve another country from liability for torturing prisoners of war.

"American veterans tortured as prisoners of war deserve justice, and justice delayed is justice denied," Braley said. "This bill sets our priorities straight- protecting American citizens and veterans who were tortured as human shields and POWs is a much higher priority than protecting foreign assets. We must send a message that other countries will be held accountable for torturing Americans, so that it never happens again."

In 2002, 17 American ex-prisoners of war who were brutally tortured in Iraq during the first Persian Gulf War sued Saddam Hussein's regime. The veterans eventually won a judgment against Hussein. But shortly after the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration stepped in and had the judgment overturned.

Braley's bill now moves to the full House for consideration.