U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs

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Office for Victims of Crime

OVC Fact Sheet

Advocating for the Fair Treatment of Crime Victims

What You Can Do If You Are a Victim of Crime

I don't believe half of the American population or even a small portion knows what can happen to you when you are a victim of a crime going through the criminal justice process.

—A crime victim quoted in *New Directions from the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century,* 1998.

Crime victimization is a frightening and unsettling experience for the millions of Americans whose lives it touches each year. As recently as 1972, there were almost no services available to help crime victims or their survivors repair the damage done to their lives and property, or contend with the traumatic and frustrating ordeal of prosecution of the offender. Today, however, due largely to the dedicated efforts of advocates, lawmakers, and individual victims of crime, there is a tremendous range of services and resources designed to help victims obtain justice and healing. The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), the U.S. Department of Justice agency that advocates for the fair treatment of crime victims, wants you to know that if you or someone you love is a victim of crime—you have rights, you can get help, and you can work for positive change.

You Have Rights

A majority of States have amended their constitutions to guarantee certain rights for crime victims. Typically, these include the following fundamental rights:

- The right to notification of all court proceedings related to the offense.
- The right to be reasonably protected from the accused offender.
- The right to have input at sentencing (in the form of a victim impact statement).
- The right to information about the conviction, sentencing, imprisonment, and release of the offender.
- The right to an order of restitution from the convicted offender.
- The right to notice of these rights.
- The right to standing to enforce these rights.

If you are a victim of or witness to a crime, these rights apply to you. Information about these rights may be obtained through your local victim/witness assistance program (usually located in the prosecutor's office), your State Attorney General's office, or U.S. Attorneys' offices.

You Can Get Help

Literally thousands of programs now exist in the United States that provide services and sanctuary to crime victims. These programs are located within both State government agencies and private nonprofit or charitable organizations. Services provided through these programs are of two general types—*compensation* and *assistance*. Crime victim *compensation* programs reimburse victims of crime occurring within the State (including victims of federal crimes) for crime-related expenses. Crimes include violent crimes such as homicide, rape, drunk

driving, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse and neglect. Expenses covered are medical costs, mental health counseling, funeral and burial costs, and lost wages or loss of support. Crime victim *assistance* programs provide a range of services including crisis intervention, counseling, emergency shelter, criminal justice advocacy, and emergency transportation. Although compensation and assistance are usually provided to individuals, in certain instances entire communities may be eligible to receive assistance when a multiple victimization occurs. Information about compensation and assistance can usually be obtained through your local prosecutor's office or may be provided to you by your local law enforcement agency when you report an offense.

Financial support for many of these crime victims programs is provided through the Crime Victims Fund administered by OVC. The Fund is supported, not by tax dollars, but by fines, penalty assessments, and bond forfeitures collected from convicted Federal offenders and is distributed among the States and Territories annually.

You Can Work for Positive Change

The progress that has been achieved to improve the treatment of crime victims is due largely to the efforts of untold thousands of individuals who have turned their victimization into a force for positive change. Victims and survivors of victims of homicide, rape, child abuse, domestic violence, and other serious offenses have transformed their experience into a vehicle for ensuring that victims of similar types of crime are afforded true justice, meaningful assistance, and compassionate treatment before the law. Many of these victims and survivors have volunteered their own time and resources toward such worthwhile activities as creating and staffing programs, conducting legislative advocacy, working in shelters, answering crisis hotlines, and speaking on victim impact panels. Similar opportunities exist in virtually every community. Working for positive change will help ensure that this progress is not lost and that new ground can be broken as greater justice and healing is gained for all victims of crime.

National Victim Organizations Stand Ready to Assist You

If you have been the victim of a crime and are seeking information or referrals on victims' rights, services, and criminal justice resources, the following organizations may be of assistance to you:

Childhelp USA/Forrester National Child Abuse Hotline 800–422–4453
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) 800–438–6233
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children 800–843–5678
National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information 800–729–6686
National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect 800–394–3366
National Criminal Justice Reference Service 800–851–3420
National Domestic Violence Hotline 800–799–7233
National Fraud Information Hotline 800–876–7060
National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) 800–879–6682
National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) 800–394–2255
Parents of Murdered Children (POMC) 513–721–5683
Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center (OVCRC) 800–627–6872
Family Violence Prevention Fund/Health Resource Center 800–313–1310
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence 800–537–2238
Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network 800–656–4673
Child Protection and Custody 800–527–3233
Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Child Protection and Custody 800–527–3223
National White Collar Crime Center 888–693–2874

On the internet:
Office for Victims of Crime . . . . . <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/
National Criminal Justice Reference Service . . . . . <http://www.ncjrs.org