



Office of the Victim Advocate 2014 Administrative Digest

A Division of the Office of Governmental Accountability

At a Glance

Statutorily established - June 8, 1998

Operational - September 1999

Statutory authority - CGS Sec. 46a-13b et seq.

Central office - 505 Hudson Street, 5th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106

Website address - www.ct.gov/ova

Email address - ova.info@ct.gov

Number of full-time employees - 5

Recurring operating expenses - \$435,447 for Fiscal Year 2014

Organizational structure –

Independent state agency under the direction of Garvin G. Ambrose, Esq.

Mission

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) seeks to ensure that victims of crime become an integral part of the criminal justice system. Through public education of the rights and services available to crime victims, collaboration with law enforcement and service providers, as well as court and legislative advocacy, the OVA believes that the voices of crime victims will become a necessary component of our state.

Overview

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) was statutorily established in 1998, and became operational in 1999, as an independent state agency charged with the promotion and protection of the constitutional and statutory rights of crime victims in Connecticut. Among its many responsibilities, the OVA provides oversight of state and private agencies, and advocacy to crime victims when a violation of their rights is at issue.

In order to fulfill its mandate, the OVA receives and reviews complaints of persons concerning the actions of any state agency or other entity that provides services to crime victims. When appropriate, the OVA may also initiate formal investigations into the circumstances of a complaint so as to remedy the concern in a systemic manner.

As part of its enforcement abilities, the Victim Advocate is statutorily authorized to file a limited special appearance in any court proceeding for the purpose of advocating for a victim

when their rights have been violated. In addition, as part of its advocacy efforts, the OVA conducts programs of public education on the rights of crime victims, undertakes legislative advocacy when necessary, and recommends systemic changes in state policies to ensure the proper treatment and protection of crime victims.

The Office of the Victim Advocate currently operates under the following statute when determining who is a "victim of crime" or "crime victim:" --- **C.G.S. Sec. 1-1k:** Except as otherwise provided by the general statutes, "victim of crime" or "crime victim" means an individual who suffers direct or threatened physical, emotional or financial harm as a result of a crime and includes immediate family members of a minor, incompetent individual or homicide victim and a person designated by a homicide victim in accordance with section 1-56r.

Statutory Responsibility

In order to fulfill the mandates of the OVA, the Victim Advocate may:

- Evaluate the delivery of services to victims by state agencies and entities that provide services to victims;
- Coordinate and cooperate with other private and public agencies concerned with the implementation, monitoring and enforcement of the constitutional rights of victims; enter into cooperative agreements with such agencies for the furtherance of these rights;
- Review procedures established by any state agency or other entity providing services to victims with respect to the constitutional rights of victims;
- Receive and review complaints of persons concerning the actions of any state or other entity providing services to victims; investigate those complaints where it appears that a victim or family of a victim may be in need of assistance from the Victim Advocate;
- File a limited special appearance in any court proceeding to advocate for any right guaranteed to a crime victim by the state constitution or any other right provided to a crime victim by the general statutes; however, no appearance may be filed in cases involving infractions or misdemeanors that do not involve the use, attempted use or threatened use of physical force against another person;
- Ensure a centralized location for victim services information;
- Recommend changes in state policies concerning victims;
- Conduct programs of public education, undertake legislative advocacy, and make proposals for systemic reform;
- Monitor the provision of protective services to witnesses by the Chief State's Attorney; and
- Take appropriate steps to advise the public of the services of the OVA, the purpose of the office and procedures to contact the office.

Public Service

The State Victim Advocate and his staff endlessly endeavor to appropriately address the concerns brought forth by crime victims or those on behalf of crime victims. As part of this effort, the State Victim Advocate and his staff frequently engage with crime victims, state agencies who provide services to crime victims, and non-profit organizations to discuss the handling of particular matters that may require action by the OVA. The goal of the OVA is

always to provide the necessary advocacy and education to victims so that they remain knowledgeable and vigilant in their efforts to become survivors instead of victims.

Improvements/Achievements 2013-2014

During the 2013/2014 fiscal year the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) operated as a functional state agency committed to effectively and efficiently carrying out its statutory mandates.

Despite a robust statutory mandate, with minimal staffing to accomplish such mandate, the hard-working staff of the OVA attained many successes throughout the fiscal year – none bigger than the creation of the Governor’s Victims’ Rights Enforcement Advisory Commission (VREAC) on April 7, 2014. The creation of the VREAC assures crime victims that Connecticut is on a path to guarantee that their State constitutional and statutory rights will be enforced. Although more work is required to make certain that the State constitutional and statutory rights of crime victims remain part of the criminal justice vocabulary, the immediate success lies in that these rights have now become part of the discussion. We are extremely proud of this accomplishment, and thank Governor Malloy and his administration for their continued support.

To better understand the triumphs attained through application of the OVA’s vision and new approach, as well as the struggles to enforcement of these rights, below is a summary that highlights a small part of the work performed by the OVA during the reporting period (March 15, 2013 to June 30, 2014). This format is intended to simply show an overview of the work, and not a detailed description of our daily activities.

Advocacy

- The Victim Advocate visited the home of crime victims in Cheshire and Torrington.
- The OVA was requested to intervene on behalf of the victim’s family in the matter of *State v. Skipwith* out of Waterbury Judicial District (together with State’s Attorney Platt, we were able to convince the court to allow the deceased victim’s mother to speak post-sentencing as she did not have the opportunity to do so pre-sentencing).
- **Collaborated** with the Board of Pardons and Paroles to obtain a “Victim Anonymity” policy where victims would not be required to give identifying information during parole hearings.
- Accompanied victim to **court** on a Motion for Continuance in the *State v. Jamaal Coltherst* resentencing case (pursuant to *Miller v. Alabama* ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court).
- The OVA requested an Advisory Opinion from Attorney General Jepsen on the issue of Mandatory Minimum sentences and the authority of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, as well as the Department of Corrections, to circumvent that mandatory minimum sentence by allowing inmates to parole prior to serving the minimum time imposed ([Advisory Opinion 2014](#)). A letter was sent to the Legislative Leaders in February of 2014 to make them aware of this phenomenon.
- As part of its **court advocacy**, the OVA attended an egregious Violation of Probation/Restitution hearing in Derby on 9/3/13 with the victim’s family, where the defendant was sentenced to 1yr to serve, and a Written Order of Restitution was entered for \$10,760.

- The OVA also worked tirelessly to obtain pro bono legal representation for one of its victims during the pending criminal court process.
- The OVA proposed several Practice Book Rule changes to the Probate Court regarding the disbursement of funds to a beneficiary arrested or convicted of a crime against the decedent; the Court has decided to move forward with voting on the proposals.
- The OVA participated in the Judicial/Media committee meeting regarding arrest warrants and the availability of information to the media.
- In support of its **court advocacy**, and to follow-up on a request for OVA assistance, the Victim Advocate attended the Frankie Resto sentencing in New Haven; the defendant received a 53yr sentence on a plea of murder and robbery.
- The OVA worked with state prosecutors to reopen several criminal matters, post disposition, for the purposes of the issuance of a Written Order of Restitution in each case, as well as the urging for the deportation of a sex offender in another case. A Written Order of Restitution was entered on behalf of the victim in each case, and for the full amount requested; the sex offender was deported this month.

Administrative

- Began work on changing image of the office through print and electronic materials, including website, Facebook, and brochures, as well as the creation of an office seal and new logo to properly represent the mission of the OVA (dignity, respect, honor), and to enhance our professionalism.
- The OVA continued its **rebranding** efforts by enhancing the public website to make it more user friendly, visually appealing, and relevant.
- The OVA expanded its staff count with the hire of a project manager to develop a sustainable and effective **public outreach and education** program for the office.
- OVA served as Vice Chair on the Governmental Accountability Commission during the search for the new Executive Administrator at the Office of Governmental Accountability.
- The OVA **collaborated** with the company Scan-Optics and the State Library to accomplish its goal of creating a streamlined record retention and preservation system to safeguard valuable agency records and files in case of emergency, while also decreasing waste.

Appointments

- Appointed by Governor Malloy to be a member of the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission (CJPAC) on 4/10/13 – first time for OVA on this Commission.
- Appointed by Governor Malloy to be a Public Member on the Police Officers Standards and Training Council (POSTC) on 4/30/13 – first time for the OVA on this Council.
- Task Force on Victim Privacy and the Public’s Right to Know – August 2013
- Victim Rights Enforcement Advisory Commission Chairperson – April 2014

Collaborations

- In **collaboration** with the Community Renewal Team (CRT), the OVA staff volunteered at the “Tee off With Women to End Domestic Violence” Golf Classic, where the Victim Advocate was an Honorary Chairman; staff also volunteered to read to the children at CRT during their reading program.

- In an effort to decrease spending regarding the ordering of transcripts, on 9/6/13, the OVA **collaborated** with the Office of the Chief Court Administrator to gain access to the Judicial Branch's JEB portal for Sentencing Transcripts. This collaboration resulted in a decrease in OVA spending for transcripts from \$1060.25 during 2012-2013 down to \$65.50 in 2013-2014.
- As part of its **efforts to collaborate** with other agencies and service providers, the OVA participated in the VOICES Program at MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution; participated in a multi-agency discussion with DOC regarding amending their Mission/Vision; attended the "Building Bridges" conference at CCSU; and attended the Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking conference presented by the Department of Children and Families (DCF).
- As part of our continued efforts to remain educated for the betterment of the victims we serve, the OVA staff **collaborated** with the Department of Correction to tour Carl Robinson, Northern, York, Hartford jail, MacDougall-Walker, Willard-Cybulski, and Osborne correctional facilities, as well as participate in the VOICES program at Willard-Cybulski and York correctional facilities and at Manson Youth Institution, and met with MADD to discuss court advocacy and other partnerships.
- The Victim Advocate **collaborated** with CONNSACS and the Mandell JCC as a Panelist for the "Brave Miss World" Jewish Film Festival movie Talk Back on 3/23/14.
- As part of its **efforts to collaborate** with other agencies and service providers, the OVA presented to judges and court personnel at the Probate Court Training; and received training on the SAVIN system from the Office of Victim Services.

Education

- The OVA sponsored an Identity Theft Training provided by the National Victim Assistance Organization also known as NOVA.
- The OVA created a training that was presented during the annual State's Attorney training regarding restitution and plea agreements (first invite for the OVA).
- The Victim Advocate attended and spoke at the 9th Annual Missing Persons Vigil in Naugatuck to address the need for a central repository of missing persons' information.
- With the goal of **public outreach and education** in mind, the OVA staff presented to the students at the University of St. Joseph; met with the Capitol Region Chiefs of Police Association; visited various domestic violence shelters; attended a hearing of the Psychiatric Security Review Board; and presented to the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission.
- The OVA met with legislators and victim advocacy groups to provide outreach and education in targeted areas of the state.
- In an effort to unveil the new **public outreach and education** campaign of the OVA, staff provided an informational training to over 70 legislative aides regarding Victims' Rights and the role of the Office of the Victim Advocate.
- We expanded our efforts of **public outreach and education** by meeting with and presenting to the Statewide Black Clergy at the Capitol building.
- As part of the **education and outreach** efforts of the OVA, the Victim Advocate judged the CT Invention Convention at Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy; met with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to discuss several Privacy Bills before the legislature; and interviewed with the CT Law Tribune regarding the creation of the VREAC.

Events

- The Victim Advocate was invited to attend, and did attend, the State's Attorney's Diversity Luncheon prior to beginning tenure so as to introduce the OVA and shape an ongoing partnership.
- The Victim Advocate was invited to attend, and did attend, the South Central Child Advocacy Center Accreditation Celebration in New Haven.
- Presented the OVA's Crime Victim Assistance Award to Mr. John Duffey, Victim Services Unit; Department of Correction upon his retirement.
- The Victim Advocate was invited to attend, and attended, a vigil for a homicide victim that was coordinated by Mothers United Against Violence (M.U.A.V.).
- The OVA attended and spoke at the MADD 5th Annual Walk in West Hartford
- The OVA co-sponsored and spoke at the 17th Annual Melanie Ilene Rieger Memorial Conference Against Violence at Central Connecticut State University.
- OVA staff served as invited guests to the OVS joint Staff Meeting to discuss the relationship of the offices, and our continued joint efforts to service all crime victims.
- Our partners honored the OVA when the Victim Advocate was recognized by the CCADV as one of the "First 100 Men" working on behalf of domestic violence victims.
- In the spirit of the holiday season, the OVA continued its **public service** efforts by sponsoring a family and providing Christmas gifts for the three children through the use of donated funds.
- The OVA was an invited guest to Senator Blumenthal's roundtable discussion at the University Of Hartford regarding Sex Assault on college campuses.
- The Victim Advocate was the Keynote Speaker at the Department Of Correction's graduation on 3/14/14.
- The Victim Advocate appeared on the show "The Real Story" with Al Terzi on 4/6/14 to discuss **legislation** dealing with victim privacy and the public's right to information.
- As part of the National Crime Victim's Rights Week (NCVRW), on 4/7/14, the OVA spearheaded the creation and announcement of the Governor's Victims' Rights Enforcement Advisory Commission (VREAC) to develop **enforcement** mechanisms to remedy violations of a crime victim's rights; the OVA and other service providers such as CCADV, CONNSACS, MADD, and OVS also **collaborated** during NCVRW to hold an event at the Hartford Library to honor crime victims.
- The OVA attended the Statewide Government Expo sponsored by U.S. Senator Chris Murphy and State Senator Paul Doyle.
- May 28, 2014, marked a historic day in Connecticut as the Governor's Victims' Rights Enforcement Advisory Commission (VREAC) held its first meeting in Hartford to discuss the actual **enforcement** of the State constitutional and statutory rights of crime victims.
- The OVA co-sponsored, and spoke at, the "18th Annual Melanie Ilene Rieger Conference against Violence" that was held on June 4th and 5th at Central Connecticut State University.
- In furtherance of its efforts to bolster the **enforcement** of crime victims' rights, the Victim Advocate and a staff member attended the 13th Annual National Crime Victim Law Institute's (NCVLI) conference to recruit experts for presentation to the VREAC.

Legislation

- With anticipation of a robust **legislative** session in 2014, the OVA skillfully negotiated essential changes to the Connecticut Sentencing Commission's destructive Juvenile resentencing bill for the benefit of all crime victims (the bill eventually failed during the legislative session).
- The OVA began its **legislative advocacy** in support of the Campus Sexual Assault, Intimate Partner, and Stalking bill by submitting testimony with amended language, and engaging in discussions with other partners.
- The Victim Advocate met with key legislators and testified before the **legislature** in support of the OVA's proposals and the Privacy Task Force's recommendations, and against the Juvenile resentencing bill proposed by the Connecticut Sentencing Commission.
- The OVA attained successful passage of two of its introduced pieces of **legislation** for victims: (1) inclusion of Violation of Standing Criminal Protective Orders in the persistent offender statute, and (2) requiring notice to certain victims when a defendant is seeking entry into the Alcohol Education Program (AEP).

Outreach

- The Victim Advocate began visiting various agencies and courthouses throughout the State to repair and develop beneficial relationships.
- The OVA participated in outreach and education efforts at the Race to End Violence event at Central CT State University.
- The Victim Advocate attended and spoke at the Domestic Violence Liaison training at the State Police Academy Training Center as part of our **education and outreach**.
- In an effort to attract a wider base of interns, and bolster the internship program at the OVA, the Victim Advocate contacted and met with University of Connecticut professors.
- In furtherance of expanding **outreach** to underserved victims in this state, the Victim Advocate met with the African American Affairs Commission to discuss ways of collaborating on **public education** matters.
- The OVA also held numerous meetings with targeted legislators to jump-start the OVA Pilot City Outreach Initiative in Bridgeport, Hartford, Norwich, New London and Windham/Willimantic.
- As part of its continuing efforts to **increase outreach and education**, the OVA published "A Guide for Victims of Crime – What you need to know." These, along with other informational materials, were distributed to state courts, police departments, senior centers, and town halls throughout the state. They were also distributed during our promotional presence at the Willimantic Street Festival.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute
The OVA has complied with all federal and state requirements regarding
affirmative action and equal opportunity.