



***Office of the Victim Advocate***  
***FY 2014 - 2015 Administrative Digest***  
*A Division of the Office of Governmental Accountability*

### ***At a Glance***

***Established - June 8, 1998***

***Operational - September 1999***

***Statutory authority - C.G.S. §46a-13b et seq.***

***Central office - 505 Hudson Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Hartford, CT 06106***

***Number of employees - 5 (1 vacant since March 2015)***

***Recurring operating expenses - \$417,408 for FY 2014***

***Organizational structure - Independent executive branch state agency under the direction of Natasha M. Pierre, 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 services providers, as well as court and legislative advocacy, the OVA believes the voice of crime victims will become a necessary component of our state.***

### **Statutory Responsibility**

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 the mandates of the OVA, the State Victim Advocate may:

- Evaluate the delivery of services 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;
- 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 agency or other entity providing services to crime victims; initiate formal investigations into the circumstances of a complaint so as to remedy the concern in a systemic manner.
- 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 general statutes;
- Recommend systemic changes in state policies to ensure the proper treatment and protection of crime 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;
- Ensure a centralized location for victim services information.

OVA currently operates under the following statute when determining who is a “victim of crime” or “crime victim;” C.G.S. § 1-1k: Except as otherwise provided in the general statutes, “victim or 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.

### **Public Service**

The State Victim Advocate and her 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 agency frequently engages 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 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 2014-2015**

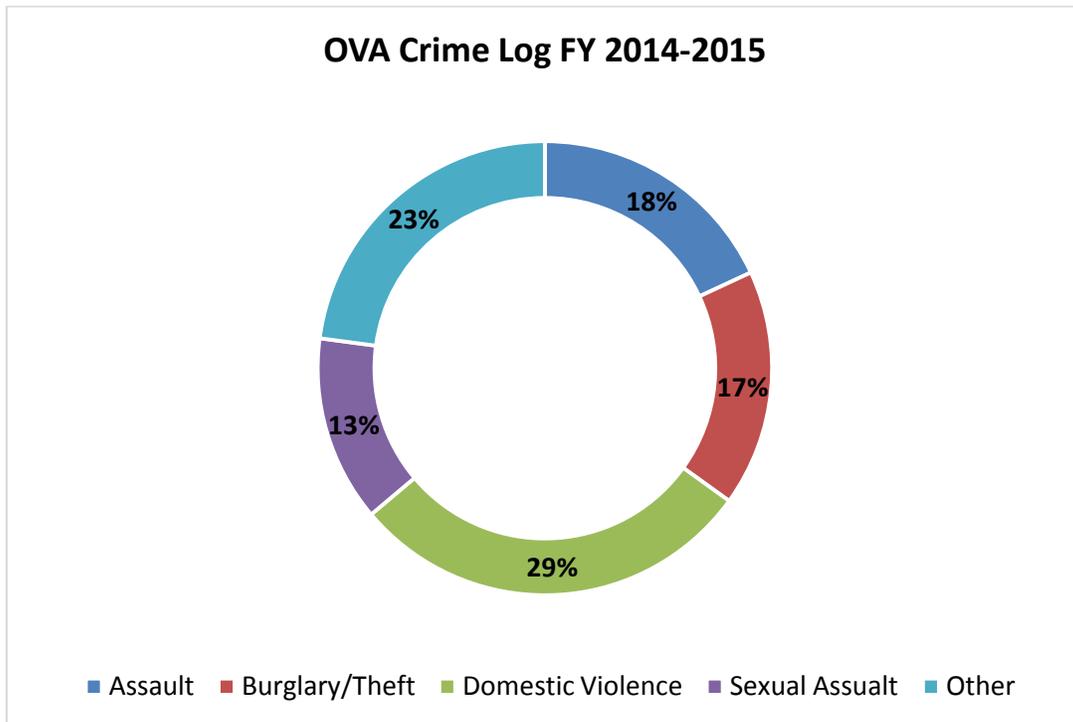
During the 2014/2015 fiscal year OVA operated as a functional state agency committed to effectively and efficiently carrying out its statutory mandates. Despite a robust statutory mandate, with minimal staffing to accomplish such mandate, the hard-working staff of the OVA attained many successes through the fiscal year.

The new State Victim Advocate took over the leadership of the Governor’s Victims’ Rights Enforcement Commission (VREAC), which was established on April 7, 2014 (the previous State Victim Advocate resigned in the summer of 2014), and requested an extension to continue the

discussions regarding recommendations. VREAC must review the current status of crime victims' rights in the State and report its findings and recommendations to the Governor. In January 2015, OVA submitted a Progress Report, outlining five preliminary recommendations, to the Governor's office.

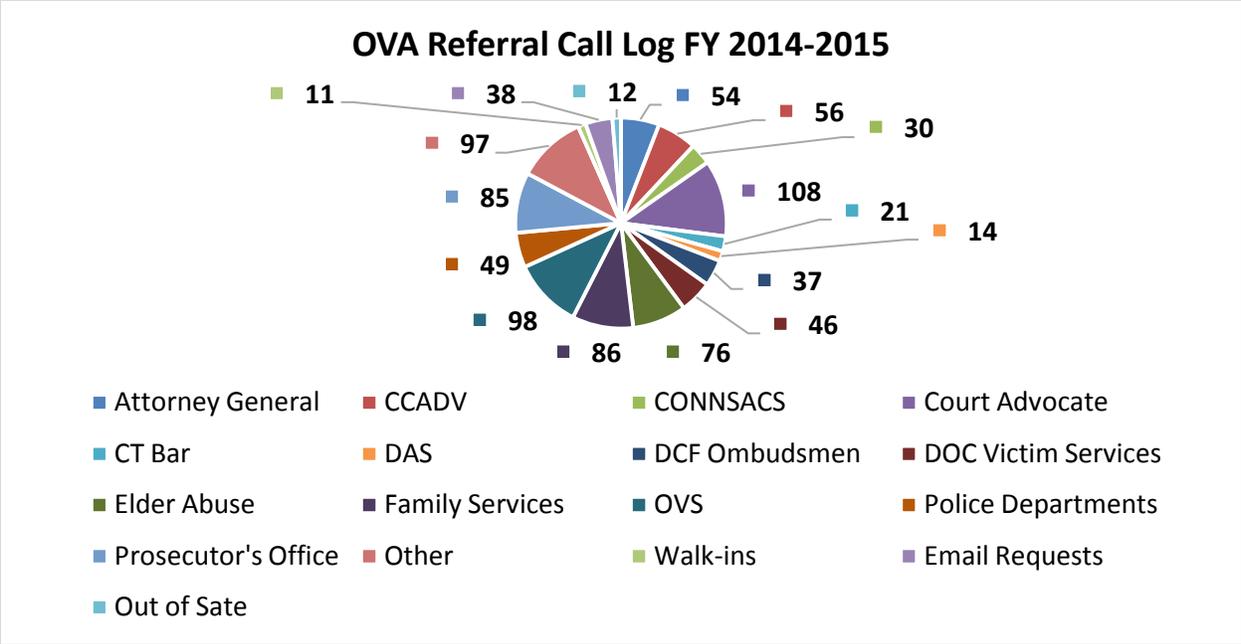
**Advocacy:**

During the fiscal year, OVA received 1,038 calls, resulting in opening 110 cases. Demographically, the clients were: 61% female, 35% male and 4% unidentified; 59% Caucasian, 18% Hispanic/Latino, 12% African American/Black, 1% Asian and 10% other or unknown; 13% minors, 54% adults, 8% senior citizens and 23% unidentified.



*Note: Other crimes include one to four cases of bullying, elder abuse, harassment/stalking, home invasion, homicide/murder, identity theft, mother vehicle violations, and post-conviction crimes.*

The remaining calls resulted in immediate referrals to service providers or another State agency, as indicated in the chart below:



OVA staff accompanied 10 victims to court 39 times. In some cases, the OVA filed limited appearances to address matters to the Court on behalf of clients. In other cases, OVA attended for moral support and to educate clients about the criminal justice process. Additionally, OVA monitors Connecticut Supreme Court cases that impact victim’s rights. In this capacity, OVA attended the oral arguments in *State v. Anderson* in January 2015.

**Appointments:**

The State Victim Advocate has been appointed to the following boards or commissions to address the needs and concerns of the agency and victims of crime: Criminal Information Sharing System, Criminal Justice Information System Governing Committee, Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission, Eye Witness Identification Task Force, Family Violence Governing Council, Governmental Accountability Commission, Governor’s Task Force on Justice for Abused Children, Governor’s Youth and Urban Violence Commission, Racial and Ethnic Disparity Council, Sentencing Commission, Task Force to Study Service of Restraining Orders, and the Trafficking in Persons Council.

**Collaborations:**

The OVA staff volunteered at the Community Renewal Team’s “Tee off With Women to End Domestic Violence” Golf Classic, where the State Victim Advocate was an Honorary Chair and keynote speaker. OVA staff also volunteered at the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Melanie Ilene Reiger Conference Against Violence, where the State Victim Advocate was a panelist. OVA collaborated with law enforcement via participation in the VOICES Program at MacDougall-Walker Correctional institution, tours of several correctional facilities, and “ride-alongs” with the Hartford Police Department.

**Education and Outreach:**

OVA held its first annual 5k run/walk during National Crime Victim's Rights Week in April 2015. The race attracted 75 guests, runners, survivors, family members and service providers.

The OVA presented at several events throughout the state through events held by universities, police associations, and senior center community centers, reaching approximately 1,100 individuals. Additionally the State Victim Advocate met with legislators, victim advocacy groups, state's attorneys, and other public agency officials to provide outreach and education in targeted areas throughout the state.

Despite the loss of the public outreach and education staff person in March 2015, the OVA continued to maintain print and electronic materials, including the website, Facebook, Twitter, and brochures for distribution to the public, the judicial branch and law enforcement agencies.

**Legislation:**

The State Victim Advocate met with key legislators and testified before the Legislature on key bills that address crime victim's rights. The OVA monitored 199 bills and submitted testimony on 26 bills before the Aging, Children, Appropriations, Higher Education & Employment Advancement, Insurance & Real Estate, Judiciary, Labor & Public Employees, Public Health, Public Safety & Security, and Transportation Committees. Key issues this legislative session were: ensuring that crime victims' rights are not violated or diminished in several criminal justice reform bills, improving the criminal justice response in family violence matters, mandated reporting of child and elder abuse, sexual assault forensic examinations and timely evidence processing, and freedom of information requirements.

**Information reported as required by State Statute**

The OVA has complied with all federal and state requirements regarding affirmative action and equal opportunity.