



Office of the Victim Advocate
FY 2020-2021 Administrative Digest
A Division of the Office of Governmental Accountability

At a Glance

Natasha M. Pierre, *Victim Advocate*

Established: June 8, 1998

Operational: September 1999

Statutory Authority: Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 46a-13b et seq.

Central Office: 505 Hudson Street, 5th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106

Number of Employees: 4

Recurring Operating expenses: \$427,419 appropriated for FY 2020

Organizational Structure: Independent executive branch state agency

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 Authority

The 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.

The OVA currently operates under the following statute when determining who is a “victim of crime” or “crime victim;”

Conn. Gen. Statues Sec. 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, and state and nonprofit agencies that provide services to crime victims to discuss particular matters that may require action by the OVA.

Improvements/Achievements

The OVA operated as a functional state agency committed to effectively and efficiently carrying out its statutory mandates.

Client Advocacy: The OVA received 608 requests for assistance during the fiscal year, and had an open caseload of 199 clients. In addition to providing assistance, the OVA referred clients to 70 state, federal, private or community agencies to assist the clients in other areas related to the crime.

Clients self-identified as:

- 62% female, 34% male and 4% unidentified;
- 64% Caucasian, 12% African American/Black, 12% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 0.5% European, 0.5% other, and 10% unidentified.
- At the time the crime was committed, 15% were minors, 49% were adults, 5% were senior citizens and 31% were unidentified.

The types of crimes committed were: assault, bullying, domestic/family violence, DUI fatality, harassment/stalking, home invasion, homicide/murder, identity theft, motor vehicle, sexual assault, theft, and UT Visa. In five (5) cases, the crimes were committed by juveniles.

The crimes were committed in: Ashford, Avon, Baltic, Bloomfield, Branford, Bridgeport, Bristol, Burlington, Canton, Cheshire, Danbury, Danielson, Dayville, Derby, East Hampton, East Hartford, East Haven, East Lyme, Ellington, Enfield, Granby, Griswold, Guilford, Hamden, Hartford, Jewett City, Lisbon, Manchester, Mansfield Center, Meriden, Middlebury, Middlefield, Milford, Morris, Mystic, Naugatuck, New Britain, New Canaan, New Haven, New London, Newington, Niantic, North Branford, North Haven, North Stonington, Norwalk, Norwich, Old Saybrook, Orange, Pawcatuck, Plainville, Prospect, Putnam, Redding, Rocky Hill, Shelton, South Windsor, Southbury, Southington, Stamford, Stonington, Torrington, Trumbull, Vernon/Rockville, Wallingford, Waterbury, Waterford, West Hartford, West Haven, Westport, Willimantic, Willington, Windsor, Windsor Locks, and Wolcott.

Crime Victims' Rights Violations

Clients reported the following violations of their constitutional rights:

- 36 were denied their right to be treated with fairness and respect by prosecutors, police departments, judges, investigators, and defense attorneys.
- 5 were denied their right to timely disposition of the case following the arrest of the accused.
- 31 were not reasonably protected from the accused.
- 9 did not receive notification of court proceedings.
- 9 were not allowed the opportunity to attend the trial or other court proceedings
- 14 could not communicate with the prosecution about the case.
- 8 were denied their right to object or support a plea agreement.
- 5 were denied their right to make a statement in court at sentencing.
- 25 did not receive financial restitution.
- 3 did not receive information about the arrest, conviction, sentence, imprisonment or release of the accused

Legislative Advocacy: The OVA monitored 96 bills and submitted testimony on 14 bills before the Appropriations, Government Administration & Elections, Housing, Judiciary, and Public Safety and Security Committees.

Systemic Advocacy: The OVA worked with the Judicial Branch and several local law enforcement agencies to address recurring issues, such as restitution, information requests, and access to court proceedings. The OVA also worked with the Judicial Branch and the State's Attorney to develop administrative policies to address crime victims' rights violations by the court system. The OVA monitors approximately 100 juvenile offender parole eligibility cases and maintains a webpage of said information for crime victims to access the information.

Education and Outreach: The OVA hosted a week-long virtual conference during National Crime Victims' Rights Week in April 2020. The theme, *Support Victims. Build Trust. Engage Communities.* emphasized the importance of addressing crime victims' rights and concerns during the COVID pandemic. The OVA was honored to have representatives from the CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence, the CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Department of Correction Victim Services Unit, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Office of Policy Management, and Survivors of Homicide conduct workshops or events throughout the week. The conference was attended by 161 individuals, representing law enforcement, attorneys, victim advocates, services providers and members of the community dedicated to providing services to victims of crime. The conference was offered at no charge. The OVA continued to maintain print and electronic materials, including a newsletter, a website, Facebook, Twitter, and brochures for distribution to the public, the judicial branch and law enforcement agencies.

Appointments: The State Victim Advocate is appointed to the following boards or commissions to address the needs and concerns of victims of crime: Connecticut Sentencing Commission, Criminal Information Sharing System, Criminal Justice Information System Governing Committee, Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission, Domestic Violence Offender Program Standards Advisory Council, Eye Witness Identification Task Force, Family Violence Governing Council, Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children, Juvenile Justice Policy & Oversight Commission, Police Officer Standards and Training Council, Racial and Ethnic Disparity Council, SAFE Advisory Committee, Task Force to Study the Filing of Habeas Corpus Matters, and the Trafficking in Persons Council.

Collaborations: The OVA collaborated with the CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence, the CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Department of Correction Victim Services Unit, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Office of Policy and Management, and Survivors of Homicide for the National Crime Victims' Rights Week Virtual Conference.

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