

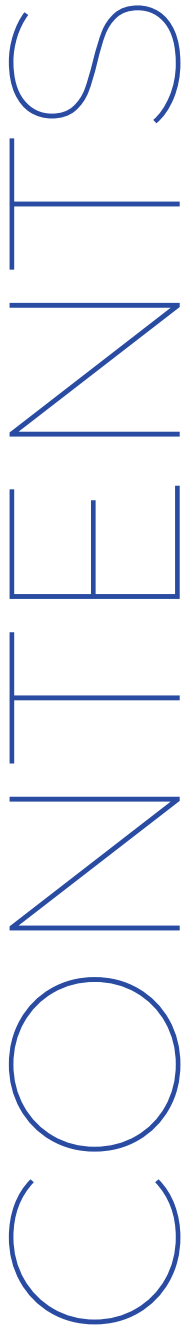


STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF THE VICTIM ADVOCATE

2022

Annual Report

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SUBMITTED, AS STATUTORILY MANDATED TO THE GOVERNOR OF THE
STATE OF CONNECTICUT, AND TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY JANUARY 2024.

Constitution of the State of Connecticut

Article XXIX

Rights of Victims of Crime

In all criminal prosecutions, a victim, as the General Assembly may define by law, shall have the following rights:

- The right to be treated with fairness and respect throughout the criminal justice process;
- The right to timely disposition of the case following arrest of the accused, provided no right of the accused is abridged;
- The right to be reasonably protected from the accused throughout the criminal justice process;
- The right to notification of court proceedings;
- The right to attend the trial and all other court proceedings the accused has the right to attend, unless such person is to testify and the court determines that such person's testimony would be materially affected if such person hears other testimony;
- The right to communicate with the prosecution;
- The right to object to or support any plea agreement entered into by the accused and the prosecution and to make a statement to the court prior to the acceptance by the court of the plea of guilty or nolo contendere by the accused;
- The right to make a statement to the court at sentencing;
- The right to restitution which shall be enforceable in the same manner as any other cause of action or as otherwise provided by law;
- The right to information about the arrest, conviction, sentence, imprisonment and release of the accused.

The General Assembly shall provide by law for the enforcement of this subsection. Nothing in this subsection or in any law enacted pursuant to this subsection shall be construed as creating a basis for vacating a conviction or ground for appellate relief in any criminal case.

XXIX
ARTICLE

MISSION STATEMENT

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 are a necessary component of the criminal justice process.

www.ct.gov/ova

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Helping

The OVA's small, but efficient team, handles a high volume of calls, emails, inquiries, and on-line complaint submissions every day. The OVA's mission is to provide comprehensive support, information, resources, and assistance, if necessary, to ensure each caller is prepared to navigate through the criminal justice system and has access to the resources available to crime victims.

Courts

The OVA provides advocacy to crime victims when an alleged violation of their state constitutional rights is at issue. The OVA works to ensure that crime victims are an integral part of the criminal justice system.

Stakeholders

The OVA provides valuable referrals through our strong connections with local community and non-for-profit agencies that provide a variety of services to victims of crime.

Government

The OVA was statutorily established in 1998 as an independent state agency charged with the protection, promotion and enforcement of the state constitutional and statutory rights of crime victims in Connecticut. The OVA is statutorily defined as a criminal justice agency.

Legislation

The OVA undertakes legislative advocacy to promote and advance the rights of crime victims. The OVA monitors all legislative proposals that may impact crime victims' rights and/or services and testifies, when necessary, regarding various proposals.

Public Safety

The OVA provides information and referrals to crime victims, particularly victims of family violence, concerning obtaining an order of protection. The OVA also provides information to victims about the various notification programs available that promote victim and public safety.

Commissions

The OVA is an active member on various state boards, councils, and commissions. The OVA's role is to ensure that crime victims' rights are at the forefront of policy initiatives and criminal justice reforms.

Outreach

The OVA provides free trainings to state agencies and other entities to promote the state constitutional rights of crime victims and available resources. The OVA participates in various informational events around the state to further promote awareness and education about the rights of crime victims.



OVERVIEW

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) was statutorily established in 1998 as an independent state agency charged with the promotion and protection of the constitutional and statutory rights of crime victims in Connecticut (C.G.S. §46a-13b). Among its many responsibilities, the OVA provides oversight of state and private agencies that provide services to crime victims, and advocacy for crime victims when a violation of their state constitutional and statutory rights are 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.
- 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:" 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.A

CLIENT ADVOCACY

The OVA opened 61 cases, received 55 online complaints, provided 306 instant referrals, and monitored 11 juvenile offender early release cases. The OVA often gets requests for assistance by crime victims in areas that are not under the purview of the agency. These are considered “instant referrals” and were made to the following organizations:

- 211
- Attorney General
- Child Advocate
- CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence
- CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- DCF Ombudsman
- Department of Aging
- Department of Correction
Victim Services Unit
- Department of Education
- Family Court
- Family Relations
- Law Enforcement
- Legislators
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving
- Mothers United Against Violence
- Office of the Chief State’s
Attorney
- Office of Victim Services Judicial
Branch
- Board of Pardons and Parole
- Probation Office
- State Attorney’s Offices
- Survivors of Homicide



CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Clients reported that seven (7) of the ten (10) constitutional rights granted to crime victims were violated during the criminal court process, as follows:

- To be treated with fairness and respect.
- To be reasonably protected from the accused throughout the criminal justice process.
- To receive notification of court proceedings.
- To object or support a plea agreement.
- To make a statement to the court at sentencing.
- To receive financial restitution.
- To receive information about the arrest, conviction, sentence, imprisonment or release of the accused.

These violations were conducted during criminal cases involving assault, domestic violence, harassment/stalking, homicide, sexual assault, and theft. The crimes were committed in: Bridgeport, Bristol, Cheshire, East Hartford, Fairfield, Greenwich, Hartford, Manchester, Milford, New Britain, New Haven, Newington, Norwich, Orange, Stamford, Torrington, and Waterbury. The cases were heard in Bridgeport Superior Court, Derby Superior Court, Fairfield Judicial District, Hartford Superior Court, Manchester Superior Court, New Britain Superior Court, Rockville Superior Court, Stamford Superior Court, Torrington Superior Court, and Waterbury Superior Court.



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

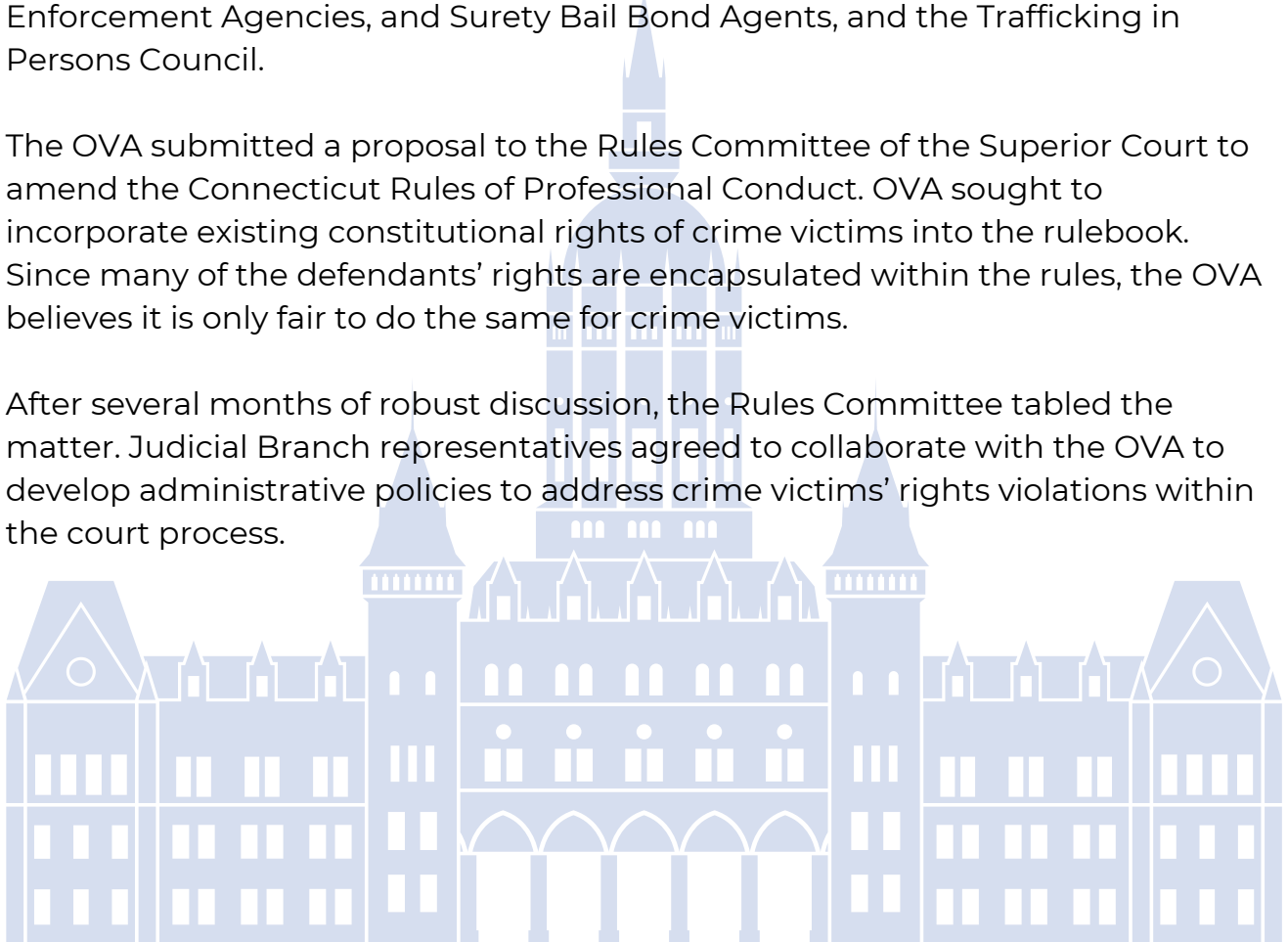
The OVA monitored 48 bills and submitted testimony before the Appropriations, Judiciary, and Public Safety & Security Committees.

SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

The State Victim Advocate is appointed to the following boards and commissions to address the needs and concerns of victims of crime: Connecticut Information Sharing System, Criminal Justice Information System Governing Committee, Connecticut Sentencing Commission, 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, Racial and Ethnic Disparity Council, SAFE Advisory Committee, Task Force to Study the Regulation of Professional Bondsmen, Bail Enforcement Agencies, and Surety Bail Bond Agents, and the Trafficking in Persons Council.

The OVA submitted a proposal to the Rules Committee of the Superior Court to amend the Connecticut Rules of Professional Conduct. OVA sought to incorporate existing constitutional rights of crime victims into the rulebook. Since many of the defendants' rights are encapsulated within the rules, the OVA believes it is only fair to do the same for crime victims.

After several months of robust discussion, the Rules Committee tabled the matter. Judicial Branch representatives agreed to collaborate with the OVA to develop administrative policies to address crime victims' rights violations within the court process.



COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

01

TRAINING

The OVA staff presented and conducted trainings for the Office of Victim Services and the Division of Criminal Justice Adult Probation Services.

02

MENTORSHIP

The State Victim Advocate mentored students for the academic year via the University of Connecticut College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Women's Leadership Collective.

03

NCVRW

During Crime Victims' Rights Week in April 2022, the OVA highlighted the theme Rights, Access, Equity for All Victims: Help crime survivors find their justice by hosting a week-long virtual conference led by crime survivors. Each day of the week, a crime survivor kicked off the day and a service provider closed out the day.

The OVA was honored that Cheryl Gomes and Jane Doe No More shared their stories of surviving domestic and sexual violence, and a path forward in the aftermath. The OVA provided a historical review of crime victims' rights in Connecticut. The OVA also held a viewing of The Amendment, a powerful and inspiring true story of finding triumph over tragedy, injustice, and loss. In 1979, Brooks Douglass and his sister Leslie survived a devastating crime that rocked their community and took their parents' lives. The CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence, the CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV), Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), and Survivors of Homicide conducted workshops or events throughout the week.

OVA STAFF

With a team of dedicated professionals, the OVA staff works tirelessly to provide resources and support to those who have been impacted by crime.



Natasha M. Pierre, Esq., State Victim Advocate – Ms. Pierre was appointed as the State Victim Advocate on November 28, 2014, by Governor Dannel P. Malloy and assumed her responsibilities on December 26, 2014. The Legislature confirmed her appointment in February 2015.

Merit Lajoie, Complaint Officer --- Mrs. Lajoie joined the OVA in May 2000. She advocates for clients during the criminal justice process, assists in legislative advocacy, conducts public education and outreach, and represents the OVA on boards and commissions.



Hakima Bey-Coon, Esq., Staff Attorney 3 --- Ms. Bey-Coon joined the OVA in March 2006. She provides legal counsel to clients concerning crime victim rights and represents the OVA on boards and commissions.

Vanessa M. Torres, Administrative Assistant --- Ms. Torres joined the OVA in January 2011. She conducts intakes, manages office and budget administration, and implements social media and public education and outreach strategies.



The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) is charged with the promotion and protection of the constitutional and statutory rights of crime victims in Connecticut. The OVA provides oversight of state and private agencies, and advocacy to crime victims when a violation of their rights is at issue.

CONTACT

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