

Office of the Victim Advocate



Office of the Victim Advocate
A Division of the Office of Governmental Accountability

At a Glance

NATASHA M. PIERRE, ESQ., *State 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 - \$421,421 appropriated for FY 2017;
\$387,708 allocated for FY 2017***

***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 service 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

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;”

Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 1-1k: Except as otherwise provided in 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.

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.

Improvements/Achievements 2016-2017

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 during the fiscal year.

Advocacy: OVA received approximately 600 calls and opened 57 new cases, resulting in 104 open cases at the end of the fiscal year.

Of the new cases, clients self-identified as 67% female, 32% male and 2% unidentified; 58% Caucasian, 16% African American/Black, 8% Hispanic, 1% Scottish/Italian and 11% unidentified. At the time the crime was committed 6% were minors, 43% were adults, 5% were senior citizens and 46% unidentified. The types of crimes committed were: 9 Assault, 8 Burglary/Theft, 16 Domestic/Family Violence, 2 Elder Abuse, 2 Harassment/Stalking, 2 Homicide/Murder, 7 Motor Vehicle, 1 Order of Protection Violation, 5 Sexual Assault, and 10 other.

Callers were referred to one or more of the following agencies: Board of Pardon and Paroles, Chief Public Defender, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Connecticut Bar Association, Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Connecticut Corruption Taskforce, Connecticut Innocence Project, Connecticut Legal Services, Court Support Services Division, Department of Aging, Department of Children and Families, Department of Consumer Protection, Department of Correction, Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection, Department of Labor, Department of Motor Vehicle, Department of Social Services, Division of Criminal Justice, ID Theft Federal Trade Commission, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, National Alliance on Mental Illness, National Crime Victims Bar, Office of Adult Probation, Office of the Child Advocate, Office of the Healthcare Advocate, Office of Victim Services, Survivors of Homicide, State's Attorney's offices, U.S. Department of Education, US Department of Justice, Victim Rights Center of Connecticut, Inc., and the Witness Protection Program.

OVA staff accompanied clients to multiple court hearings. 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.

To address systemic issues raised by victims, the OVA has worked with the Judicial Branch and several local law enforcement agencies to address recurring issues, such as restitution, retrieval of property, and information requests.

Additionally, the OVA has maintained a webpage to educate crime victims of potential hearing dates for juvenile offenders impacted by U.S. Supreme Court decisions *Graham v. Florida (2010)* and *Miller v. Alabama (2012)*.

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, Eye Witness Identification Task Force, Family Violence Governing Council, Governor’s Task Force on Justice for Abused Children, Governor’s Youth and Urban Violence Commission, Juvenile Justice Policy & Oversight Commission, Racial and Ethnic Disparity Council, and the Trafficking in Persons Council.

Collaborations: The OVA staff participated in the Community Renewal Team’s annual “Tee off With Women to End Domestic Violence” Golf Classic, and the VOICES Program at MacDougall-Walker Correctional institution.

Education and Outreach: The OVA presented at several events reaching over 1,200 individuals. These educational events were held by community organizations, senior center community centers, and universities. The OVA also conducted a social media campaign to highlight Missing Persons Day.

The OVA held a Legislative Breakfast to educate new and incumbent legislators about the agency and crime victims’ legislative concerns. Additionally the State Victim Advocate met with legislators, victim advocacy groups, and other public agency officials to provide outreach and education in targeted areas throughout the state.

The OVA sponsored or participated in events during the National Crime Victims’ Rights Week: tabling in the Legislative Office Building concourse in Hartford to provide information about crime victims’ rights, resources and services, the Melanie Rieger Crime Victim Rights Symposium, and the Connecticut Alliance’s press conference in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness month.

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.

Legislation: The State Victim Advocate met with legislators and testified before the Legislature on key bills that address crime victim’s rights. The OVA monitored bills and submitted testimony on 30 bills before the Appropriations, Children, Insurance & Real Estate, Judiciary, Public Safety and Security, and Transportation Committees.

Information reported as required by State Statute

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