



Office of the Victim Advocate
FY 2023 Administrative Digest
A Division of the Office of Governmental Accountability

At-a-Glance

Agency:	Office of the Victim Advocate
Commissioner:	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, 5 th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106
Number of Employees:	4
Recurring Operating expenses:	\$491,095 appropriated for FY 2023
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 is a necessary component of the criminal justice process.

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.

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;"

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 and state and nonprofit service providers on 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: In FY 2023, the OVA had 108 open cases, provided 189 instant referrals, and monitored 155 juvenile offender early release cases.

Crime Victims' Rights Violations: Clients reported the following constitutional rights were violated during the criminal court process:

- To be treated with fairness and respect by prosecutors, police departments, judges, investigators, and defense attorneys.
- Timely disposition of the case following the arrest of the accused.

- To be reasonably protected from the accused throughout the criminal justice process.
- Notification of court proceedings.
- To attend the trial or other court proceedings
- To communicate with the prosecution about the case.
- To object or support a plea agreement.
- To make a statement to the court at sentencing.
- Financial restitution.
- 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 cases were heard in Bridgeport Superior Court GA #2, 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.

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.

Legislative Advocacy: The OVA monitored 161 bills and submitted testimony on 21 proposals before the Aging, Appropriations, and Judiciary 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.

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

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

During Crime Victims' Rights Week in April 2023, the OVA highlighted the theme: *Elevate. Engage. Effect Change.* The OVA hosted two canvas painting parties in West Hartford and Milford, CT for crime victims to fellowship and share information about the legislative process.

The OVA maintains print and electronic materials, including a website, Facebook, Twitter, and brochures for distribution to the public, the judicial branch and law enforcement agencies.

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