



Courage • Strength • Resilience

Annual Report

FY 2018-19



pennsylvania
OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCATE

Giving Crime Victims a Voice



December 1, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

The Office of Victim Advocate is pleased to announce the release of our Annual Report for 2018-2019. While it is not a legislative requirement for the Office of Victim Advocate to submit an annual fiscal report, in the spirit of transparency I feel strongly that the Commonwealth be informed of the outstanding work being done and the services provided to crime victims.

The Office of Victim Advocate is responsible for elevating the voices, needs and concerns of all crime victims within the post-sentencing process in Pennsylvania. As the Victim Advocate, it is my unique and honored role to ensure those voices are heard at all levels of government.

If this year could be summed up in one word it would be: reform. Reforming our justice system to ensure fairness and balance which included our support of justice reinvestment, parole reform, statute of limitation reforms, restructuring reporting laws for sexual misconduct, and Marsy's Law. I spent the year traveling across the Commonwealth meeting with homicide advocates in Philadelphia on a monthly basis to encourage coordination in response and service delivery, offering service and support in Pittsburgh in the heartbreaking aftermath of the Tree of Life shootings, and working to foster state connections in response and after action coordination. I met with countless survivors who have come forward and found their voices in the Marsy's Law movement, echoing a desire for enforcement and balance in our justice system after their own rights were violated. I sat with brave women who came forward against powerful men and pushed for accountability within our general assembly. I went into our state prisons and engaged in reflective dialogue with men serving life sentences to discuss the impact on survivors and ways we can reform our system to embrace restorative justice. I stood side-by-side with the hundreds of victims/survivors of catholic clergy abuse as their collective silence was finally broken by the 40th Grand Jury report; we occupied the halls of the Capitol for months urging for reform to our statute of limitations. I celebrated on the steps of the Capitol as Marsy's Law passed the House overwhelmingly and unanimously in the Senate.

As this year marks my sixth year in office, I am encouraged by the growth we have achieved and look forward to the upcoming year where I seek to expand on restorative justice dialogues, seek to create safe trauma informed spaces for survivors, offenders, stakeholders, and advocates to come together and work towards meaningful and purposeful reform that will make our state a better place to live, heal, and grow.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Storm, Commonwealth Victim Advocate

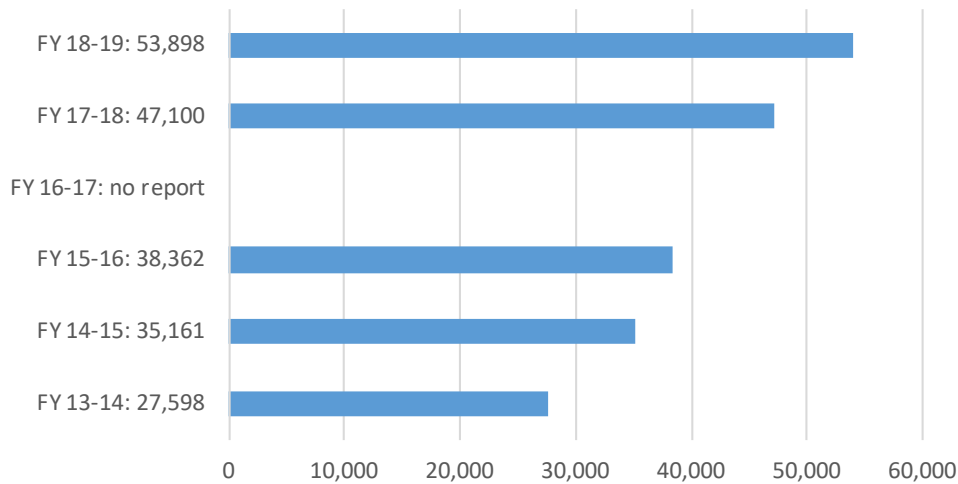


Registrations

Only those registered with OVA receive notifications of the movement of their offender and are provided opportunity to give input when their offender is being reviewed for parole eligibility. Registering victims/survivors with OVA is crucial in order to facilitate all of the rights afforded to them under current law. Victims/survivors are eligible for registration at the time an offender is sentenced to state incarceration or supervision. By law, it is incumbent upon the district attorney (DA) to supply the crime victim/survivor with information about OVA. OVA has advocated to the legislature that it be made mandatory through law that the DA provide OVA with victim/survivor information so that we may fully inform them of their rights.

Since FY 13-14, we have seen a 51% increase in crime victim registrations. This is a result of proactive outreach and includes victims not previously acknowledged, informed or empowered.

Crime Victim Registrations



Intake Assessment & Referral Unit

The Intake Assessment and Referral Unit (IARU) was created to answer the higher demand of crime victims/survivors calling in for support. With a goal of dedicating select coordinators solely to assisting, deescalating, and assessing the needs of crime victims/survivors, we have streamlined our services. The IARU is currently staffed by 4 coordinators and one supervisor, and has successfully provided the opportunity to help clients in a more holistic and trauma informed approach.

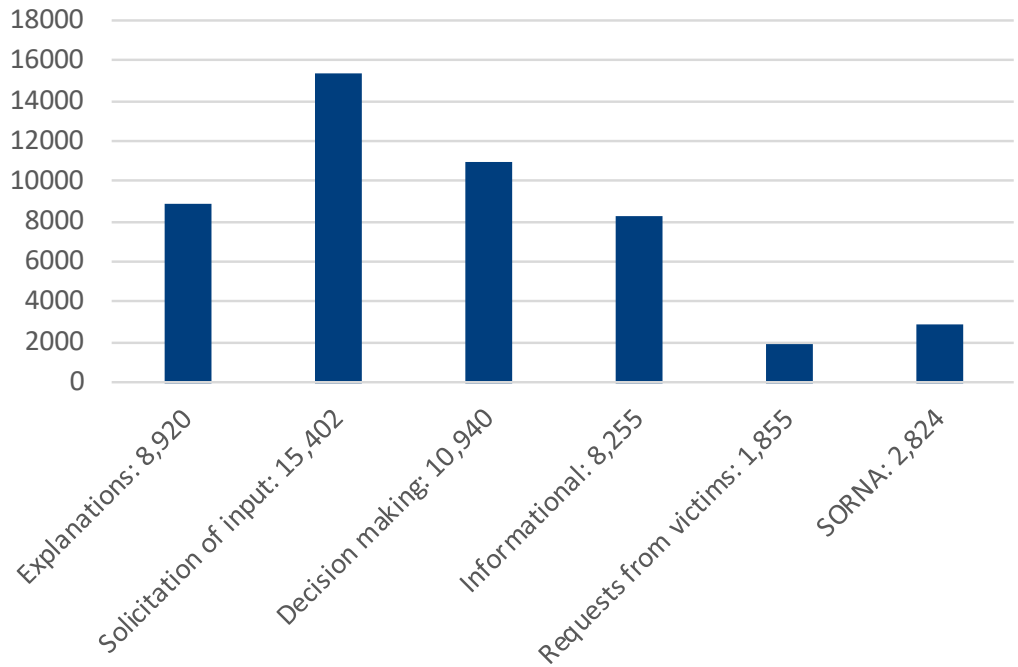


Daily average: 62 calls per day



Notifications

Victims/survivors registered with OVA receive a variety of notifications regarding the status of their offender(s).



Programs

Inmate Apology Bank (IAB)

Victims/survivors of crime may wonder whether their offender has taken responsibility or feels remorse for their actions. Likewise, offenders may want to accept responsibility for their actions and acknowledge the harm they caused. The Inmate Apology Bank (IAB) was created for victims/survivors who are interested in receiving an apology letter from the offender in their case. IAB allows letters to be written and received without violating policies that prohibit offenders from contacting victims/survivors.





Programs continued

Address Confidentiality Program (ACP)

ACP is available to victims/survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, as well as their household members. The program provides an alternate mailing address to keep their actual home address out of public records where their perpetrator may find their location. Through ACP, the Office of Victim Advocate will forward first-class mail to participants in a confidential manner.

Program coordinators work hand in hand with county victim service providers to register participants. This includes extensive safety planning for the victim/survivor. The program also entails a level of advocacy that can include speaking with employers, schools, departments of motor vehicles, court systems, other states, etc. as it pertains to keeping the victim/survivor's address confidential.

291 registrations **701 current adults, 812 children**



featuring



Restitution Advocacy

Victims/survivors contact our office for assistance in navigating the restitution process. The Victim Assistance Coordinator works with county clerk of courts, probation and parole, collections, district attorneys, as well as prisons, agents, and collection agencies to ensure that victims/survivors are receiving the most timely restitution available. **In FY 18-19, there were 405 incoming restitution cases. 400 cases were resolved, meaning that the advocate adequately triaged the process on behalf of the victim/survivor.**

Institutional Victim/Survivor Assistance

Incarcerated victims/survivors of crime deserve and have a legal right to services just like any other crime victim/survivor, whether their victimization happened prior to incarceration or while serving their sentence. Staff who are assaulted while on the job in a state institution are afforded all the same rights and services as any other crime victim/survivor in the Commonwealth. OVA has an advocate dedicated to providing free and confidential services to anyone who has an active or pending criminal case where they are identified as the crime victim/survivor or anyone who is physically assaulted while incarcerated or working in a state facility.

The institutional Victim Assistance Coordinator attended specialized training in Connecticut this year to learn a new evidence based curriculum to reduce trauma.

10 advocacy meetings providing service to 5 inmates

17 institutional visits to promote services



Victim/Survivor Input

Testimony

Crime victims/survivors have the right to provide input to a panel of board members when their offender becomes eligible for parole. OVA assists victims/survivors in preparing their testimony to be provided in writing or in person.

628 In Person Testimony Requests



1103 Attendees



featuring

Board of Pardons (BOP)

OVA provides support and accompaniment services to victims/survivors who choose to testify or provide comments during the Board of Pardons process. There is an increased number of offenders filing for commutation consideration, receiving merit review, and being granted a public hearing; therefore, an increased need for these services for victims/survivors. 689 BOP related notifications were provided this fiscal year.

Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD)

VOD is a victim-initiated program. It's an opportunity for the victim/survivor to ask questions about the crime, express to the inmate how it affected their lives, and can empower the victim/survivor to hold the inmate directly accountable. The inmate may also benefit by being able to accept responsibility and recognize the real life impacts.

With the addition of a full-time VOD Coordinator (April 2018), the program has now eliminated the waiting list that previously existed for victims. The next goal of the program is to establish specially trained facilitators to handle sexually violent cases. 73 VOD related notifications were provided this fiscal year.

VOD Facilitator Training

24 new facilitators were trained in victim-centered restorative justice practices.



65 facilitators



20 active



managing



Trainings

Impact of Crime (ICC)

OVA oversees the ICC class - a mandatory program offered at all state correctional institutions in 2017. In FY 18-19, OVA trained 24 new DOC facilitators to continue to provide this training to staff.

SORNA Regional Trainings

OVA traveled the state to provide trainings specific to the Sex Offender Registration Notification Act (SORNA).

- Pittsburgh: 49 attendees
- Harrisburg: 49 attendees
- Philadelphia (right): 82 attendees



The Victim Advocate joined a panel discussion for the Office of General Counsel on sexual misconduct in the workplace.

The panel focused on training commonwealth legal staff on recognizing the signs and ongoing symptoms of sexual misconduct, and its culture, within our state government workplace.

Various Trainings



- Foundational Academy: 2
- Institutional Victim Awareness: 1
- Corrections Counselor Training: 4
- Transitional Housing Unit: 2
- Impact of Crime Class: 4
- Basic Training - County: 3
- Basic Training - State: 4
- Address Confidentiality: 4



Community Impact

Resilient Voices

The path to healing is different for everyone. Often times, for survivors and others affected by crime, healing leads to a desire to speak – to embrace their voice and share their personal experience with others. The goal of the Resilient Voices Program is to provide a space for survivors to share their experience, strength and hope. Members are offered opportunities to speak at community events throughout the year.

54 total speakers

12 new members added



Pajama Drive

OVA hosts a pajama drive for foster children across PA each year. This year, over 2,000 pajamas were donated.

Pictured right is Tara Gross, at the quarterly Pennsylvania Children and Youth Association meeting, with county representatives who collected pajamas.



Crisis Response

The Office of Victim Advocate is required to provide counties with victim assistance during large scale crime-related crises, as outlined in the Commonwealth Emergency Operations Plan set forth by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. The Office of Victim Advocate may be called to respond with or without an official disaster declaration. The following are events in which OVA provided various levels of crisis response support:





Community Impact *continued*

Speaking/Rallies/Events

The Victim Advocate is charged, by statute, to represent the voice of the victim/survivor community throughout all levels of government in Pennsylvania. This is accomplished in the following ways:

Legislation and Policy Advocacy

A vast array of bills were introduced, advocated for, and some passed within FY 18 - 19. We saw a year of bipartisan support for many crime victims' rights issues, as well as criminal justice reform. Here is a snapshot on some of the bills and reforms that OVA proudly supported.



Marsy's Law



Restitution Tax Intercept w. York County & Dept. of Revenue



Domestic Violence & Firearms



Reentry Reform



Buyer Beware Act



SB 540 Introduction



Mandatory Reporting w. OAG & District Attorneys



#metoo Legislation



Smart Talk on Marsy's Law



Workplace Harassment



Karen's Law



Community Impact *continued*

Speaking/Rallies/Events *continued*

Representing Victims/Survivors in the Media

Various interviews took place throughout the year. These brought opportunities to elevate victims' voices within the media and general public, as well as occasion to spread education and awareness. Additionally, Ms. Storm participated in a documentary regarding juvenile offenders sentenced to life time incarceration.



Juvenile Lifer Documentary



WGAL re: Ellis & Leach Allegations



Media Calls w. Governor Wolf



Human Trafficking on Smart Talk



Take Back the Night w. YWCA



ABC re: clergy abuse listening sessions

Partnerships and Events



Philadelphia Cares Project



Portraits in Pride w. PHRC



Ending Cycle of Silence w. PHRC



5 State Restitution Summit, Hawaii



Stop Overdoses w. DDAP & DOH



National Crime Victims' Rights Week Rally



Community Impact *continued*

Speaking/Rallies/Events *continued*

Statute of Limitations Reform

The hot topic for survivors in FY 18 - 19 was statute of limitations reform, reignited by the 40th Grand Jury Report. This sparked an international discussion, many opportunities for education, and a necessity to continually redirect the conversation back to survivors - their needs, their voices.

(Left to right.) Press conference with survivors, Attorney General Josh Shapiro & District Attorney Kevin Steele; courageous survivors share their stories in support of reforms; a family of survivors of clergy abuse share their story on video to promote the importance of exposing predators and reforming our laws; the Victim Advocate participates in a debate about the statute of limitations at PCN; OVA accompanies survivors to Smart Talk to publicly discuss the importance of reforms; the Victim Advocate was interviewed by various reporters this year to share the survivor community's perspective on legislative reforms.





Staff Responsibilities

All of the programs and services you've read about would not be possible without this dedicated and amazing group of employees. Should you have questions or needs related to a specific area, please feel free to contact our office at 1.800.563.6399 or ra-ovainfo@pa.gov and ask to speak with the appropriate staff member listed below.

Jennifer Storm, Commonwealth Victim Advocate

- Pennie Hockenberry, Policy Director
- Ashley N. Walkowiak, Executive Assistant
- Tanner D. Widdowson, Director of Victim Services
- Karen Laird, Director of Outreach and Programming
- Tara Gross, Victim Assistance Supervisor
- Renee Bressler, Administrative Officer
- Shanda Strain, Administrative Support
- Adele White-Wright, Administrative Support

Victim Assistance Coordinators in our central office include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pam Behr <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restitution Kenneth Benka-Davies Heather Cattron <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional Victim Assistance Taylor Crum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilient Voices Cathy Eichelberger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juvenile Justice Nicole Evans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inmate Apology Bank Mandy Goddard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim Wraparound Missy Hunsberger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Confidentiality Program Heather Julius <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Person Victim Testimony | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jessica Kasaback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board of Pardons Renee Langan Tatiana McConnell <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board of Pardons Nina Morris Vicki Palmer Stephanie Rice Amanda Rohrbaugh <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim Offender Dialogue Lisa Ryan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim Awareness Education Classes, Resilient Voices Gerald "JR" Waltemyer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Confidentiality Program June Wilson-Moore <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex Offender Registration Notification Act |
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Victim Assistance Coordinators in the field include:

- Annette Gantz, Office of Attorney General
- Jaime Burgos, Philadelphia Office