



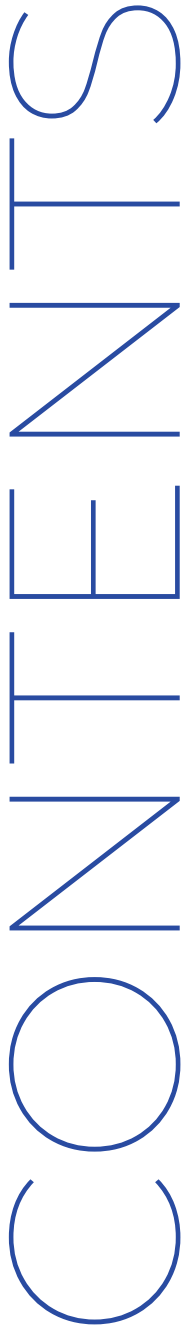
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2024 ANNUAL REPORT

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF THE VICTIM ADVOCATE



Table of Contents



01.
Connecticut Constitutional
Rights of Victims of Crime
02.
Mission Statement
03.
Overview
04.
Client Advocacy
05.
Crime Victims' Rights Violations
06.
Legislative Advocacy
09.
Systemic Advocacy
10.
Community Advocacy
11.
OVA Staff



Constitution of the State of Connecticut Rights of Victims of Crime Article First, Section 8(b)

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.

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 36 cases, received 31 online complaints, and monitored 24 youthful offender cases and 167 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 402 instant referrals were made to the following organizations:

- 211
- Board of Pardons and Paroles
- Center for Family Justice
- CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence
- CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV)
- Department of Aging
- Department of Children and Families, Hotline
- Department of Children and Families, Ombudsman
- Department of Consumer Protection
- Department of Corrections, Victim Services Unit
- Department of Social Services
- Judicial Branch, Office of Adult Probation
- Eviction resources
- Family Court
- Family Relations Office
- Legislators
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
- Office of the Attorney General
- Office of the Chief Public Defender
- Office of the Chief State's Attorney
- Office of the Child Advocate
- Office of Victim Services
- Police Departments
- Secretary of the State
- State Attorneys
- Survivors of Homicide
- Witness Protection Program



CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Clients reported that **9 of 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 attend the trial and all other court proceedings.
- To communicate with the prosecution.
- 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, assault of a pregnant woman, breach of peace, burglary, criminal mischief, cruelty to animals, disorderly conduct, domestic violence, harassment, larceny, manslaughter with a motor vehicle, property damage, resisting arrest, risk of injury to a minor, strangulation, threatening, unlawful restraint, and violation of protective orders.

The cases were before the following Superior courts: Bridgeport, Danbury, Manchester, Meriden, New London, Rockville, Stamford, Torrington, and Waterbury Superior Courts.

The crimes were committed in: Avon, Berlin, Bridgeport, Brookfield, Brooklyn, Danbury, Fairfield, Falls Village, Groton, Hamden, Hartford, Lisbon, Madison, Manchester, New Haven, Newington, Norwich, Oakville, Plainfield, Redding, South Windsor, Stamford, Tolland, Wallingford, Waterbury, West Hartford, West Haven, and Windsor.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

The Office of The Victim Advocate actively monitors and comments on proposed legislation that will directly impact victims of crime. The OVA monitored 44 bills and submitted testimony before the Committee on Children, the Judiciary, Public Safety and Security, and the Transportation Committees.

Public Act No. 24-5 (Senate Bill No. 200), An Act Concerning Changes to the Paid Family and Medical Leave Statutes (in part)

Allows an employee who is a sexual assault victim to take paid family and medical leave if it is reasonably necessary to (1) seek medical care or psychological or other counseling, (2) obtain services from a victim services organization, (3) relocate, or (4) participate in a civil or criminal proceeding related to or resulting from the assault (effective October 1, 2024).

Public Act No. 24-56 (Senate Bill No. 234), An Act Exempting Certain Law Enforcement Records from Disclosure Under the Freedom of Information Act

- Expands the exemptions under the FOIA to include (1) the identity of mandated reporters not otherwise known and (2) sworn witness statements (effective July 1, 2024).
- Expands a FOIA exemption for certain images where disclosure could constitute an invasion of personal privacy (effective July 1, 2024).
- Exempts from disclosure a photograph, film, video, digital image, or other image created by law enforcement or other government agency of a minor unless disclosure is required by the state's body and dashboard camera law (effective July 1, 2024).

Public Act No. 24-108 (Senate Bill No. 426), An Act Concerning Court Operations and Administrative Proceedings (in part)

- Requires police officers to give bail commissioners or intake assessment and referral specialists a crime victim's identifying information (effective July 1, 2024).
- Allows all crime victims to make a statement on any plea agreement prior to its acceptance by the court, instead of just those where the defendant pleads to a lesser offense than what was originally charged (effective July 1, 2024).
- Removes the requirement that a crime victim's mental or emotional impairment requires treatment through services to be eligible for victim compensation and expands permitted victim compensation by allowing payment for pecuniary loss for attending certain Psychiatric Security Review Board hearings (effective July 1, 2024).
- Increases the membership of the Connecticut Advisory Council for Victims of Crime from 15 to 20 and specifies that the council's members may represent victims of gun violence (effective July 1, 2024).
- Extends the time limits for applying to the OVS victim compensation program by one year and allows emotional harm victims to use the compensation for security measures (effective July 1, 2024).

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Public Act No. 24-118 (House Bill No. 5262), An Act Concerning Child Sexual Abuse

- Beginning July 1, 2026, the Department of Public Health (DPH) must include a sexual abuse and assault awareness prevention survey for high school administrators in the Connecticut School Health Survey (effective July 1, 2024).
- Replaces the term “child pornography” with “child sexual abuse material” in statutes that define the term and criminalize the possession, importation, and transmission of this material (effective October 1, 2024).
- Establishes a 22-member task force to study the responsiveness of the judicial branch and certain state agencies to child sexual abuse issues. The task force must report its recommendations to the Children’s and Judiciary Committees by July 1, 2025 (effective upon passage).
- Requires the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to (1) review state agency practices and procedures for ensuring the care and protection of minors in probate court guardianship proceedings and (2) report the findings to the Children’s and Judiciary committees by January 1, 2025 (effective upon passage).

Public Act No. 24-127 (House Bill No. 5399), An Act Concerning the Criminal Justice Response to Victims of Sexual Assault

- Establishes the Sexual Assault Criminal Justice Response, Enhancement, and Model Policy Advisory Council to (1) evaluate the current criminal justice response to sexual assault incidents involving adult victims; (2) develop a model policy for responding to these incidents; (3) submit the initial policy to the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) by July 1, 2025, and (4) annually review and, if necessary, update the policy and submit it to POST (effective July 1, 2024). The OVA is a member of the Advisory Council.
- Beginning September 1, 2025, POST must review, approve, and adopt a written model policy annually. This information must be distributed to law enforcement units, and POST must also annually submit recommendations on the model policy to the Legislature (effective July 1, 2024).
- Provides additional assistance to sexual assault victims by establishing that it is a police officer’s responsibility to provide immediate assistance to a victim at the scene of a sexual assault incident or at the time the complaint is filed (effective October 1, 2024).

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Public Act No. 24-129 (House Bill No. 5418), An Act Concerning Eligibility for Participation in a Pretrial Family Violence Education Program Public Act

Allows a defendant to participate in the family violence education program (FVEP) if (1) he or she is charged with certain class C violations of risk of injury to, or impairing the morals of, a child and (2) good cause is shown for allowing participation (effective October 1, 2024).

Public Act No. 24-137 (House Bill No. 5500), An Act Concerning Revisions to Various Laws Concerning Ignition Interlock Devices, the Department of Correction, Judicial Retirement Salaries, and Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure (in part)

- Identifies the factors that a court must consider when determining the least restrictive placement for a person to restore their competency for trial. For misdemeanor cases requires the court, to presume that outpatient treatment is the appropriate placement (effective October 1, 2024).
- Allows courts to issue, on a victim's behalf, a standing criminal protective order for someone found not guilty of a crime due to mental disease or defect, under the same standards and requirements that apply following a criminal conviction (effective October 1, 2024).

Public Act No. 24-139 (House Bill No. 5508), An Act Concerning Recommendations from the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee

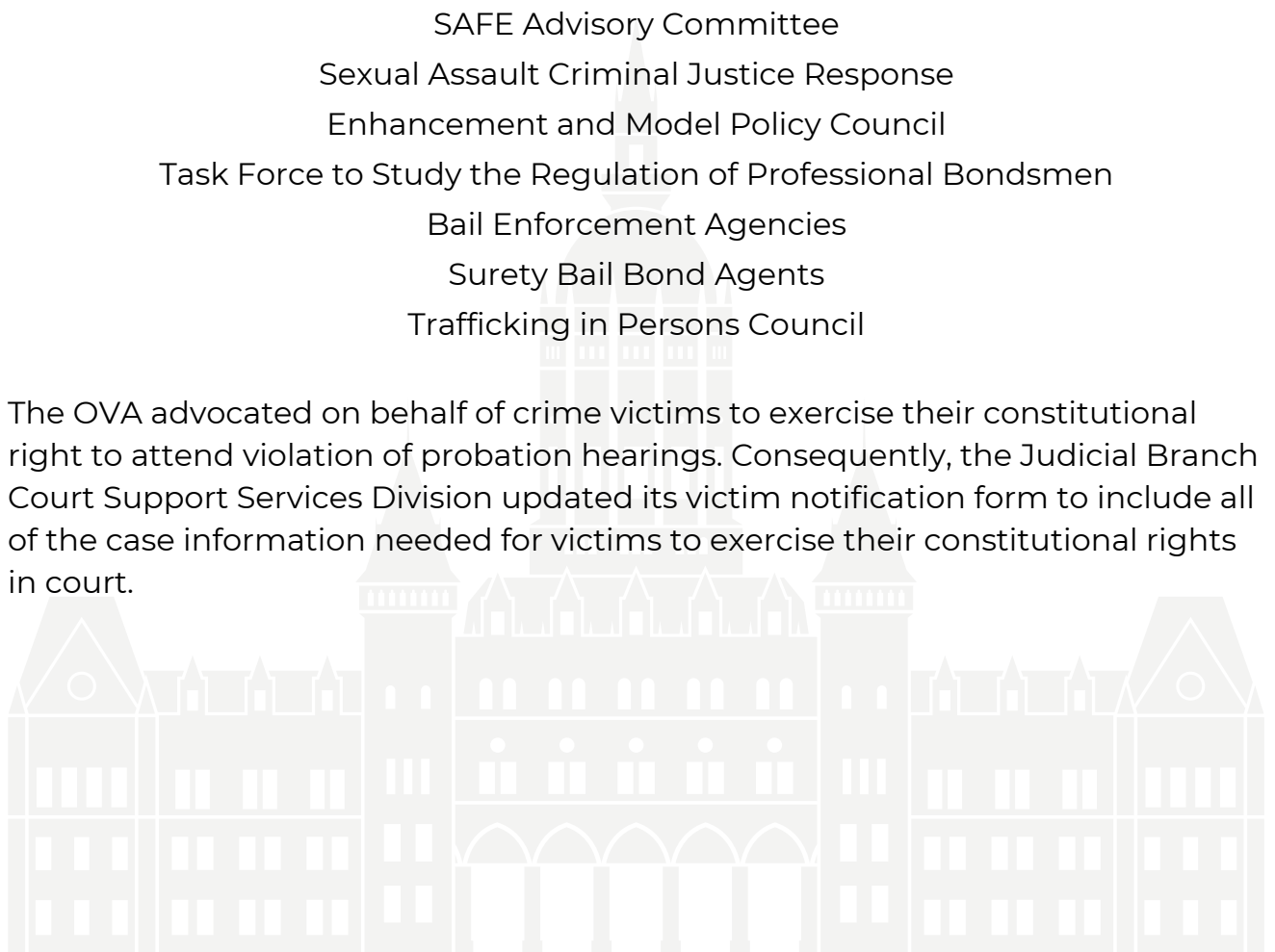
Makes various changes in laws related to youth gender responsiveness, human trafficking data analysis, and the reentry success plan for juveniles being released from the Department of Correction (DOC) and the judicial branch's facilities and programs (effective upon passage).

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 Criminal Justice Response and Enhancement Advisory
Council
Eye Witness Identification Task Force
Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children
Juvenile Justice Policy & Oversight Commission
Racial and Ethnic Disparity Council
SAFE Advisory Committee
Sexual Assault Criminal Justice Response
Enhancement and Model Policy Council
Task Force to Study the Regulation of Professional Bondsmen
Bail Enforcement Agencies
Surety Bail Bond Agents
Trafficking in Persons Council

The OVA advocated on behalf of crime victims to exercise their constitutional right to attend violation of probation hearings. Consequently, the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division updated its victim notification form to include all of the case information needed for victims to exercise their constitutional rights in court.



COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

TRAINING

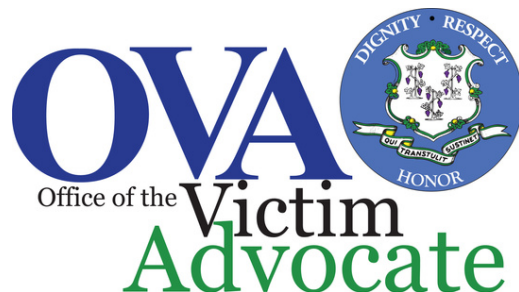
The OVA staff presented and/or conducted trainings for the CT National Guard, Institute of Living, New Britain YWCA, Office of Adult Probation, and the University of Connecticut Law School's Public Interest Law Group.

OUTREACH

The OVA staff created and shared new brochures and legislative information with the public.

NCVRW

National Crime Victims' Rights Week was commemorated in April 2024. The Office of The Victim Advocate collaborated with Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) Women's Center to host Together We Rise: A Closer Look at Careers in Victim Services. The event showcased the state organizations that aid crime victims, demonstrated how these organizations collaborate to support victims, and provided information on how CCSU students can engage in these careers via a panel discussion, one-on-one networking, and table presentations. Fifty-six (56) of the 59 registered students attended the event.



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 – Attorney 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 --- Attorney 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.

