



Justice for ALL VICTIMS

INTRODUCTION

Crime captures headlines. Whether it is a theft at a local store or a brutal attack in a college dorm room, crimes of all types make headlines—in the newspapers, on television, on the radio, and online. Yet how many Americans really understand the overall impact of crime and the importance of victims' rights to every citizen?

National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) offers a chance to look beyond the headlines—to show that crime affects not only victims but everyone. The 2008 NCVRW theme, "Justice for Victims. Justice for ALL," suggests that because anyone can become a victim of crime, every citizen has a powerful stake in victims' rights. Failure to honor these rights tarnishes our national ideal of justice for all.

To convey this compelling message to a broad audience, you need to build relationships with the media. You want to become an ally and a trusted source who reporters will seek out when covering victims and crime. Building effective media relations for National Crime Victims' Rights Week can enhance your organization's success throughout the year.

Getting to Know Reporters

Whether you are a "news junkie" or not, by regularly monitoring local newspapers, listening to radio programs, and watching local news and cable television programs on important issues, you can become an expert on which reporters cover criminal justice, legal, public policy, social, and health stories. This information is as close as your computer, as virtually all news organizations have Web sites. Make a list of reporters who cover issues you care about, and update it regularly. (See "Media Lists" on the following page for more tips.)

Pay particular attention to local stories of concern to your organization. You can call reporters directly and offer yourself or your colleagues as experts. If the media cover "your" story (or other stories you find relevant), follow up with a thank-you letter or e-mail to the reporter and the editor, especially if they do a particularly good job. Throughout the publicity-building process be sure to return media calls quickly and provide all the available information that you can appropriately share.

Gaining Coverage

To attract coverage, think like a reporter. The media view news as either "hard" (e.g., new national crime statistics, new sex offender laws) or "soft" (e.g., how the victim of a brutal assault is learning to live with his disabilities). The media will usually view National Crime Victims' Rights Week as soft news, unless high-profile crimes or related hard news events take place during the week.

By thinking about what messages might interest reporters, you increase your chances of being covered. Build your message framework around this year's theme, "Justice for Victims. Justice for ALL." You may want to focus on failures to notify domestic violence victims about the release of their abusers from jail, the denial of a victim's right to make an impact statement, communities that increase public safety by honoring victims' rights, or witness intimidation. Feature local events that showcase the importance of this year's theme for your community.

Emphasize the human impact of a crime. Show what happens when a victim's rights are denied. For example, what happens to victims when trials drag on for three years? How does a domestic violence victim feel when her abuser is released from jail and no one notifies her? Although crime trends or

Working with the Media

statistics are important, readers and viewers will remember powerful victim testimony, such as a murder victim's mother lamenting that no eye witnesses would testify against the gang that killed her child.

Media Lists

Simplify your publicity work by preparing a list of media contacts. Search the following resources:

- Yellow and white pages for the call letters and addresses of your city's radio and television stations and newspapers;
- Local radio and television station and newspaper Web sites;
- Media directories in your local library.

Internet search engines can help you identify your local media. Once you have identified these media, you can check their Web sites for the names of their editors, producers, and reporters. You can also check the white and yellow phone book pages or ask your local librarian to help you find media directories that list the names of reporters and editors, reader demographics, the paper's circulation, and staff contact information. Some library systems have telephone reference staff who can help you find such information quickly.

The following sample tools included in this section of the *2008 NCVRW Resource Guide* can support your work with the media.

Sample News Release

News releases alert news organizations about the information you would like to publicize. The more professional the news release, the more likely that reporters will give you the publicity you seek. The Resource Guide offers you a sample news release that announces National Crime Victims' Rights Week and the kickoff events in Washington, DC, and includes a quotation from John W. Gillis, Director of the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, at the U.S. Department of Justice.

Because local events have the most interest for your local media, be sure to highlight your area's National Crime Victims' Rights Week events. It's also useful to add a one-page summary that includes the name of the local event, featured activities, date, time, location, sponsors, a brief description of the event, and contact information.

Use the classic "inverted pyramid" style to organize your release: place your most important information first, followed by supporting details. Conclude with a brief paragraph about your organization, its mission, and its relationship to the event.

Send out your National Crime Victims' Rights Week news release via mail, fax, or e-mail **at least ten days** before your event. Make follow-up phone calls to offer more information and confirm media participation.

Sample Public Service Announcements

Public service announcements (PSAs), brief on-air messages that serve the public interest, can support your media efforts by building general public awareness about victim-related issues and reaching out to crime victims in your community. This Resource Guide offers three sample PSA scripts—a 15-second, 30-second, and 60-second—that you can produce with the support of your local television or radio station. In each PSA script, you should include an organization name, phone number, Web site (if available), and e-mail address so that listeners and viewers can seek more information. **NEW** this year on the Theme DVD is a broadcast-quality 30-second television PSA with space for your organization's contact information. (Script provided on page 5.)

If your media plan includes a PSA, contact the public service departments of your local radio and television stations **at least two months** before National Crime Victims' Rights Week to learn about their requirements and deadlines for PSAs. Some radio stations will accept a "live-copy" script (a public service message read on-air by an announcer) that you submit. When you mail the finished PSAs or scripts, include a cover letter that encourages the radio or television station to support your public awareness campaign.

Sample Op-ed Column

"Op-ed" columns, usually published opposite newspaper editorial columns

and often written by guest contributors, attract a wide readership. Op-eds should relate to a current event and offer a new perspective or slant on an issue of public interest. You can write your own column or coauthor the piece with another organization. This section of the Resource Guide also includes a sample op-ed and tips on how to write your own.

Other Tips

Media Advisories: *Two weeks before your event* you may want to distribute a media advisory, or media alert—a one-page notification to the media. Media advisories briefly describe a newsworthy event, such as a news conference, candlelight observance, rally, or open house. An advisory lists the “who, what, where, when, and why” of the event. Follow up your media advisory with calls to targeted reporters. If any of the major news wire services (such as the Associated Press or Reuters) has a bureau in your city, call their “day book,” which lists each day’s newsworthy events in your community, and ask that your event be listed.

Fact Sheets: Reporters need facts and reliable information to add substance to their stories. Prepare fact sheets on the issues you want to highlight for National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. You can include information such as national and local statistics on crime rates, overviews of victims’ rights laws and pending legislation, and details about volunteer activities to support victims of crime. ■

Media Strategies

- Write to the managing editors of local newspapers and the owners of radio stations *two months before* National Crime Victims’ Rights Week to request their support for your public service campaign.
- Ask your local media to focus a program or article on victims’ experiences; alert them about the crimes you want to emphasize this year.
- Contact your local cable access talk shows, which are always looking for ideas and often feature local community service agency programs.
- Call a few local public relations or marketing firms to ask if they might offer free help to plan and implement your campaign.
- Share your National Crime Victims’ Rights Week proclamation with your mayor, county executive, or city council chair (see sample in Section 2); ask them to read the proclamation at their meetings and speaking engagements the week before National Crime Victims’ Rights Week.
- After events, send high-resolution digital or 35mm black-and-white photographs to your local newspapers. Many newspapers may not have staff to cover such events, but they may print community event photos that you provide. Be sure to include a caption that identifies each person in the photo and provides a brief description of the event. Also provide the name and phone number of a person the paper can contact for more information.



SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

CONTACT:

[Name/Title/Agency]

[Phone Number]

[E-mail]

[Your City] Shows Its Support for Crime Victims *City Officials and Community Members Participate in Local Observance of National Crime Victims' Rights Week*

[City/State]—Citizens joined local officials at events throughout [Your City] today to mark the beginning of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, April 13-19. These events, coinciding with public rallies, candlelight vigils, and other activities held across the nation, honored victims, their families, and those who serve them.

"This year's theme is 'Justice for Victims. Justice for All,'" said [name of local official]. "That means there will be no justice for any of us if we don't seek greater fairness for victims of crime. It's time for our community to stand behind those harmed by crime."

Justice for victims has progressed dramatically since the 1980s. All states and the federal government have comprehensive victims' rights laws, and 33 states have constitutional amendments to protect victims' rights. Every state has a victim compensation fund, and thousands of victim service agencies help victims nationwide. Important laws, such as the federal Justice for All Act of 2004, extend protections to victims and close gaps in victims' rights.

Despite such impressive progress, however, our nation has a long way to go. Even states with strong victims' rights laws do not always honor these rights. Jurisdictions may fail to notify victims about court proceedings or offender status, deny them the opportunity to be heard at sentencing, fail to issue or enforce orders of restitution, or fail to inform victims about compensation they are entitled to receive. Some states limit specific rights to victims of violence, and in almost half the states, victims of nonviolent felonies have no rights.

"Injustice to victims weakens public safety," said John W. Gillis, director of the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. "If victims are too discouraged to report crimes or serve as witnesses, our criminal justice system grinds to a halt. Every American has a stake in victims' rights."

The U.S. Department of Justice will launch National Crime Victims' Rights Week in Washington, DC, with its annual National Candlelight Observance Ceremony on April 10, and its Awards Ceremony, April 11, to honor extraordinary individuals and programs that serve victims of crime. For additional information about National Crime Victims' Rights Week and ideas on how to serve victims in your community, please contact [agency/organization] at [area code/telephone number] or visit [agency's] Web site at [Web site address]. For more ideas on how to volunteer, visit the Office for Victims of Crime Web site, www.crimevictims.gov/volunteers.html. ■

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Type your news release, double spaced, on the sample letterhead included in this Resource Guide. Distribute your release to local media outlets at least 10 days before your event.

SAMPLE PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

This year's National Crime Victims' Rights Week theme—"Justice for Victims. Justice for All."—echoes the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, recited every morning in schools throughout the United States. You can produce powerful public service announcements (PSAs) by drawing on Americans' shared memory of that pledge.

The following sample PSAs begin with children's voices reciting, "One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." If you use one of these PSAs, ask your local radio station to add to your announcement a recording of children's voices reciting the Pledge. You can also partner with a school system or individual school to recruit children to record the Pledge of Allegiance at the local radio station and to join in ceremonies, contests, and other events. Such a partnership engages the children, parents, school, and community in observing National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

15-second PSA

Children's voices: "...*One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*"

This is National Crime Victims' Rights Week, a time to seek justice for victims of crime. To find out how you can help victims, call [your organization] at [your phone number] or visit [your Web site]. Let's support justice for victims—and justice for all.

30-second PSA

Children's voices: "...*One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*"

Crime can strike anyone—anywhere. An estimated 23 million Americans become victims of crime every year.¹ And these victims deserve justice. They need our nation to honor their rights, protect their safety, and help them rebuild their lives. This is National Crime Victims' Rights Week. To find out how you can help victims, call [your number] or visit [your Web site]. Let's bring justice for victims—and justice for all—to our community.

60-second PSA

Children's voices: "...*One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*"

Americans believe in justice for all. Yet to achieve justice for all, we must seek justice for victims of crime. Victims want offenders held accountable for their crimes. And they want our nation to honor their rights, protect their safety, and help them rebuild their lives. April 13–19 is National Crime Victims' Rights Week—a time to improve our community's response to victims. Victims may need compensation for their losses, a chance to be heard in court, or neighbors who understand that crime can happen to anyone. To find out how you can help victims, call [your organization] at [your phone number] or visit

[your Web site]. Let's bring justice for victims—and justice for all—to our community. ■

New! 30-second Broadcast-Quality TV PSA

(featured on Theme DVD)

Victim #1:

I think a lot of people think that justice is retribution. I don't think that is really what justice is about. Justice is about being able to go to sleep at night.

Victim #2:

Justice means faith that I can do something. That my voice matters.

Victim #3:

Justice must be equal. And justice for crime victims should be at the head of the table.

Tag Line*:

To learn more about justice for victims, please contact us: INSERT LOCAL ORGANIZATION'S CONTACT INFORMATION

*At the end of the PSA, five seconds of "black" are included to which local contact information can be added. (Note: white or yellow text on a blue or black screen works best; some TV stations might even be willing to add a voiceover to your contact information.)

¹ Shannan M. Catalano, "Criminal Victimization, 2005," (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006), 1, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cv05.pdf>, (accessed October 15, 2007).

HOW TO WRITE AN OP-ED

The most popular page in any newspaper is the editorial page. Readers often skip past the front page, sports pages, and television listings to find out what editorial boards and guest writers think about the most important issues of the day. To let your community know why National Crime Victims' Rights Week is so important, why not write an opinion-editorial (op-ed) about "Justice for Victims. Justice for All." for your local newspaper?

Purpose of an Op-Ed

Op-eds are statements of opinion, often by an independent contributor rather than a newspaper staff member. Newspapers customarily publish op-eds on the page opposite the editorial page. Op-eds aim to educate, inform, and often persuade the public about a particular subject. Op-ed writers may want to influence the newspaper's entire readership or a particularly influential group, such as neighborhood association leaders. To achieve the greatest impact, skilled op-ed writers strategize before they begin writing. They identify their target audience, what they want that audience to know, and what steps their readers might take to solve the problem.

Choosing a Strategy

No matter which approach you take, your op-ed will explore why our nation observes National Crime Victims' Rights Week every year. Your goal is to alert the public about denials—or lack of

awareness—of victims' rights that affect the course of justice for victims and, ultimately, for everyone. Scan the headlines and television news for a victims' rights issue that makes news in your community. You might use witness intimidation, for example, as a "hook" to explain why authorities must protect victims and conduct speedy trials. Or you might describe the death of a stalking victim who received no notification that her abuser had been released from prison. Such local cases show why seeking *justice for victims* and *justice for all* should be everyone's priority.

Op-ed Writers' Checklist

■ Start with a memorable opening.

Example: "On the night he died in a hail of machine-gun fire, eight-year-old Ethan Carter was riding his bicycle fifty yards from his house. A teenage neighbor who witnessed the crime agreed to testify against the killers. But when his mother received a death threat on the family's answering machine, the witness quickly withdrew his testimony, and the prosecutor withdrew the case."

■ Use the first or second paragraph to state the position you are taking in your op-ed.

Example: "Last year, local courts dismissed an alarming number of murder cases because witnesses refused to testify. [Your city] must do more to protect victims and other potential witnesses."

■ Show your readers why they should care.

Example: "What happened to eight-year-old Ethan Carter could happen to anyone's child. Witness intimidation and drive-by shootings that kill innocent children are everyone's concern."

■ Link your op-ed to National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

Example: "April 13-19 is National Crime Victims' Rights Week, when we focus on how crimes like witness intimidation affect our community."

■ Support your main idea with two or three points.

Example:

- "Witness intimidation affected 40 local murder cases last year."
- "Witness intimidation is increasing nationwide."
- "Speedy trials and witness protection can make a difference."

■ Back up your arguments with facts, statistics, and quotations.

Example:

- Several prosecutors interviewed for a 1996 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) report estimated that witness intimidation is a factor in "up to 75 to 100 percent of the violent crimes committed in some gang-dominated regions."²

²Peter Finn and Kerry Murphy Healy, *Preventing Gang- and Drug-Related Witness Intimidation*, (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 1996), NCJ 163067, <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/163067.pdf>, (accessed September 17, 2007).

- “We believe that witness intimidation allowed these defendants to elude justice,” said Ramon Korionoff, a spokesman for Prince George’s County State’s Attorney Glenn Ivey, in an e-mail to the *Washington Post*.³

- **End with a powerful recap of the National Crime Victims’ Rights Week theme.**

Example: “Let’s bring *justice for victims*—and *justice for all*—to our community.”

Op-Ed Style Tips

- Use short words, sentences, and paragraphs.
- Use an informal, conversational tone.
- Use active verbs (“he wrote an article,” versus “an article was written” or “there was an article written”).
- Avoid clichés (e.g., “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link”) and jargon (e.g., “RAM” for random access memory).
- Limit your op-ed to 750 words (check with your newspaper on length requirements).

How to Get Your Op-ed Published

- Choose local publications that are likely to accept your submission.
- Check your newspaper’s guidelines on space limits, deadlines, and other requirements (usually available on the publication’s Web site).
- Find out how to submit the document: mail, e-mail, or fax.
- Include your name, address, title, e-mail address, and phone numbers.



³Ruben Castaneda, “2 Killings, Dozens of Witnesses, No Closure,” *Washington Post*, August 13, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>, (accessed September 17, 2007).

Justice for Victims Keeps Communities Safe

National Crime Victims' Rights Week 2008: Justice for Victims. Justice for All.

Last year's Virginia Tech massacre reminded us that crime can strike anyone—anywhere. Twenty-three million Americans become victims every year, and violent crime is on the rise in many areas throughout our country.¹ In the six years since September 11, 2001, nearly 100,000 people have been murdered in the United States. National Crime Victims' Rights Week, observed nationwide April 13-19, calls on us to consider the life-changing impact crime has on victims and their loved ones, and to make justice for all victims an urgent priority for our community.

On paper, victims have ample access to justice. All 50 states and the federal government have victims' rights laws that prescribe how to treat victims. Thirty-three states have amended their constitutions to protect victims' rights. All states have programs to compensate victims for crime-related losses, and legislatures are passing new victims' rights laws every year. The 2004 Justice for All Act, for example, bolsters the rights of victims in federal court and offers the states a model to continue expanding victims' rights.

Yet many criminal justice systems still do not enforce these rights. Jurisdictions may fail to notify victims about court proceedings or ignore their right to be present in court. They may disregard victims' right to be informed about compensation or to be heard at sentencing. Court-ordered delays may undermine the right to a speedy trial, interrupting victims' lives and jeopardizing their recovery. More ominously, many jurisdictions are failing to keep victims safe. Although half the states give victims the right to be "reasonably protected" from offenders during the criminal justice process, frequent accounts of witness intimidation suggest how often such protections fail.²

Local officials may argue that they can't afford the staff costs required to enforce victims' rights. So how can jurisdictions—strapped for funds and struggling with crowded court dockets—justify the costs of honoring victims' rights?

First, the cost of indifference to victims' rights is incalculable. If authorities fail to enforce a protective order or notify a stalking victim when a stalker has been released from jail, victims may decide that reporting crimes or testifying in court is too costly and dangerous. Such failures undermine the safety of entire communities.

Second, enforcing victims' rights can help the criminal justice system work more effectively. A stalking victim who is notified of the stalker's release from prison can take steps to protect herself and thus prevent another crime. A domestic violence victim whose incarcerated abuser continues to threaten her can give the parole board evidence that he should not be released. Even if the offender is released, corrections officers then know he must be carefully supervised. Such information from victims enhances their own and others' safety.

Other victims' rights—to a speedy trial, to receive restitution, and to be heard at sentencing—can also help keep communities safe. Speedy trials ensure swift justice, remove offenders from the street, and minimize opportunities for witness intimidation. Court-ordered restitution recognizes and redresses the harm done to victims, forces offenders to directly compensate victims, and discourages further crimes. Allowing victims to confer with prosecutors and be heard at sentencing ensures that judges can take victims' views into account. And victim impact statements at sentencing can lead to fairer sentences and greater public confidence in the courts.

Enforcing victims' rights protects victims, enhances public safety, and fosters public confidence in our criminal justice system. Communities that support *justice for victims* invest in achieving *justice for all*. ■

¹Shannan M. Catalano, "Criminal Victimization, 2005," (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006), 1, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cv05.pdf>, (accessed September 19, 2007).

²Kelly Dedal, "Witness Intimidation: Problem Oriented Guides for Police, Problem Specific Guide Series No. 42," (Washington, DC: Community Oriented Policing Services, 2006), 5, http://www.popcenter.org/problems/PDFs/witness_intimidation.pdf, (accessed November 6, 2007).