



**April 19th -25th is National Crime Victims' Rights Week**

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Every year, millions of Americans are affected by crime. This week is a time to recognize progress that has been achieved in cementing victims' rights and to raise awareness of their rights. It is a time to recognize and celebrate services that have been implemented to assist victims, but also a time to take stock of what is still needed. The week is a time to stand with our families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors who have been impacted by crimes.

Crime Victims' Rights Week first started in the 1980s with the implementation of Crime Victims Week in 1981, which then established the President Reagan's President's Task Force on Victims of Crime in 1982. In the almost forty years since we have seen locally and nationally, efforts made to incorporate victims more into the criminal justice process and recognize that they have rights as well. In the federal system, Congress passed the Victim and Witness Protection Act, the first of several pieces of crime victims' rights legislation in 1982 and subsequently passed a series of laws, successively giving greater legislative recognition to the rights of crime victims. Thirty-three states have incorporated victims' rights into their constitutions, and other states have passed Crime Victims' Rights legislation. So far, in Delaware, there is a Victims' Bill of Rights, however it is not a constitutional amendment, as of yet.

Many victims need resources and ongoing care after crime and traumatic incident. We have seen agencies develop and expand services for victims. We have seen a nationwide shift in recognizing the importance of trauma informed care for victims, and how individuals and agencies working with victims can best serve victims in a trauma informed manner. Agencies across the state have introduced education around working with victims and expanding education as time moves on. Luckily in Delaware we benefit from being a small state where we can make connections to others in the field and collaborate to best serve victims. We also have two task forces comprised of member agencies that serve victims – the Victims' Rights Task Force and the Domestic Violence Task Force, as well as the Sexual Assault Network of Delaware. These are venues that are a good resource for advocates and others in the field to know what is happening across the state and to share information, to highlight trends in the field, and to discuss small and large scale concerns around serving victims.

In Delaware, we benefit from the collaboration across systems as well. Unlike some surrounding states and areas, Delaware has advocates in the criminal justice system – advocates located in police departments, the prosecutor's office, and Department of Correction and probation. We have non-governmental agencies that run shelter for DV victims and agencies that handle 24/7 hotlines for domestic violence and sexual assault survivors, as well as crisis hotlines. There are counseling services for victims and support groups as well. There are support groups for those

impact by a sudden death or loss of life due to violence. There are agencies that specifically work with older victims, or those that help victims that have been a victim of financial abuse. Other agencies assist with the U-VISA and T-VISA process and making sure everyone knows their rights. We also have agencies that may not do direct services, however work diligently to help manage federal monies that come into the state to assist with services for victims. We have agencies that also provide training to police, advocates, prosecutors, medical professionals, counselors, probation officer, and more. Some agencies also track legislation that may affect victims and can notify our larger advocacy community so we can proactively work with our legislators to make sure victim voices and concerns are heard.

Usually during Crime Victims' Rights Week, the Victims' Rights Task Force holds events throughout the week to honor victims. Due to COVID 19 we cannot hold the annual Tribute and Candlelight Vigil for victims. We also cannot hold a proclamation signing with Governor Carney, however he did sign a Proclamation declaring the week of April 19th as Crime Victims' Rights Week in Delaware. A 5K was also planned for the week which is on hold as well. In light of this there will be virtual events taking place in Delaware with not only the task force but agencies highlighting the week. A Day of Action is planned for Wednesday, April 22nd, where we ask people how they can best work to support or serve victims.

Crime Victims' Rights Week is an opportunity to raise awareness and honor all victims. It is a time that we can recommit to making sure victims' voices are heard and that services are accessible to all victims. It is a time to recognize the obstacles that some systems may pose to victims and how we can best address that to minimize the negative impact on victims. As we move into the week of April 19th, lets commit to continue to build partnerships across the community so we can continue to seek justice, ensure victims' rights, and inspire hope for crime victims' and those that work with them.

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For information about resources in Delaware and nationally, please visit:

[www.delawarevictimservices.org](http://www.delawarevictimservices.org)

[www.ovc.gov](http://www.ovc.gov)