

## **Expanding the Circle, Reaching All Victims: National Crime Victims' Rights Week**

*Mariann Kenville-Moore, LCSW, DVS*

*Director of Advocacy & Policy, Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence*

Earlier this week, Governor John Carney met with members of Delaware's Victims' Rights Task Force to sign a Proclamation declaring April 8 – 14, 2018 as Crime Victims' Rights Week. The Proclamation was the kick-off for a week of recognition, remembrance, and awareness-raising. Our focus, reach the millions of Americans that become victims of crime each year. In fact, this year's theme is **Expanding the Circle, Reaching All Victims**.

As a statewide organization committed to ending domestic violence, this is a crucial week for us to reflect upon and think about victims of these and other crimes. Each day we advocate for victim's rights, and there has been great progress made. We continue to grow in our understanding of how crime affects people and how we can effectively intervene and offer support. We also continue to explore ways to reach those who are too isolated or scared to seek help, or ways to help those who may have negative experiences from the past or negative impressions about our current systems of help.

According to studies by the US DOJ, about 50% of violent crimes are not reported, and only a fraction of victims receive the help they need. Domestic violence remains one of the most underreported crimes, for various reasons. Every day we speak to victims who are in fear of being deported, losing custody of their children, becoming financially unstable, or not being believed. We know that victims' rights are not all equal, and often go unenforced or ignored; but, connecting to supportive services is one of the best things a victim can do to plan for safety in the future.

Since the early 1990's, victims and witnesses of crimes committed in Delaware have had protections outlined in the state law, 11 Del C Ch 94. These protections or promises include a right to confidentiality, to be notified of court events and to be present, to be informed of advocacy and support services, to be able to talk with the prosecutor and others in the system, and to be informed of the plans for the criminal case. But although these rights exist, Delaware remains one of the few states that has yet to pass a Constitutional Amendment to make these rights real and substantial the way a Constitutional Amendment would.

Despite not having equal protections under the law, Delaware victims' advocates work tirelessly to raise victims' voices so their wishes are known to ensure that victims' rights are upheld, and that all who come in contact with the justice system are treated with respect, care, and understanding.

There are also advocates working within our communities to support victims and their families wherever they are on their journey to safety and wellness. Our member organizations, CHILD, Inc., CLASI, DE Center for Justice, People's Place, and the YWCA, offer a variety of services to help meet the often complex needs that victims of domestic violence face.

Our goal is to meet victims where they are and to help support them in their pursuit of safety and wellbeing.

### **Learn More**

If you or someone you know is a victim of intimate partner violence, call one of DE's local Hotlines to confidentially speak with an advocate. We can provide you with info on safety planning and next steps, as well as give you resources for learning more about victim rights.