

VICTIM'S ASSISTANCE

Victim Assistance programs are resources available to assist victims physically, emotionally, financially, medically, and legally when it is alleged that they were abused or neglected and/or a victim of a crime. Victims may access many of the resources within the Commonwealth regardless of the intent to file criminal charges or proceed within the criminal justice system.

- Victims have the right to access these services at any time. IP team members should offer victims assistance directly to the person. Directly means that the victim is present when options are discussed and offered. Victimization should not be taken lightly as any type of incident can cause emotional, psychological, physical, financial and behavioral consequences for individuals. Signs of trauma from an incident may or may not be present immediately after an event. Victim's assistance should be offered more than once to ensure that individuals have the opportunity to process an event and decide the support(s) they wish to access.
- In Pennsylvania, there is a strong network of victim-service programs, sometimes called "victim/witness units" that can provide help to victims after abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, or other types of crimes, such as: domestic violence, sexual assault, simple and aggravated assault, harassment, theft, and homicide. Some programs are based in the criminal/juvenile justice system and aid victims as their cases move through those systems. The other types of victim-assistance programs are community-based nonprofits, such as domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers that offer services regardless of whether a victim pursues charges, or if the case moves forward for prosecution. All services are free.
- Many of the supports available involve an advocate. Victims assistance programs employ specialized advocates to carry out the functions related to their organization. It should be noted that a person seeking supports may find themselves working with multiple advocates depending on identified needs.
- Victims have the right to effective communication through supports, such as interpreter services, language line, sign language interpreters, and agencies with TTY capabilities.
- The most Common sources of Victim's assistance are local Rape Crisis Centers, Domestic Violence Centers and the Office of Victim's Services.

Community-Based Victim's Services

Community-based agencies such as domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers can provide services regardless of whether the victim decides to press charges and/or the crime goes through the criminal justice system. Every county in Pennsylvania is

covered by domestic violence and rape crisis programs. Some counties also have a general, nonprofit agency that provides services to ALL crime victims.

Domestic Violence Shelters

- **Confidential Hotlines**
 - Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
 - Provide counseling, crisis intervention, support, information and referrals
- **Shelter**
 - 24-hour emergency shelter
 - Safe homes
 - Transitional housing
- **Counseling**
 - Empowerment counseling
 - Options counseling (*identifies victim choices; assesses risks and benefits*)
 - Safety planning (*assessment of risk and danger, strategies for enhancing safety, identification of potential resources*)
 - Support groups
- **Advocacy**
 - Legal advocacy (*legal options, preparation and assistance with Protection From Abuse [PFA] forms and filings*)
 - Medical advocacy (*based in hospitals, clinics*)
 - Children's advocacy (*counseling, therapeutic art, music, and play for children in shelter*)
 - Accompaniment (*legal services, court proceedings, other service providers*)
- **Economic Support**
 - Aid in obtaining cash assistance and employment training
 - Help with securing safe, affordable, permanent housing
 - Job training and identification of employment opportunities

Rape Crisis Centers

- Free and confidential crisis counseling, 24 hours a day
- Prevention education programs for schools, organizations, and other public groups.
- Services for the victim's family, friends, partners, or spouses.
- Information and referrals to other services in your area.
- Advocates from rape crisis centers are available to accompany victims of sexual violence, rape or incest to medical facilities, the police station, and court.
- Advocates also can intervene or act on behalf of the survivor's wishes or needs and assist in navigating the processes within the medical, police, and court systems.

System-Based Victim Service Agencies (Victim/Witness Programs, Office of Victims Services)

Each county in Pennsylvania has a program that provides services to victims of crime if charges are brought concerning what happened to them and the case proceeds through the justice system. These programs are usually located in the District Attorney's Office or the Juvenile Probation Office. Once charges are filed, someone from these offices will be in contact with the victim to initiate services. These agencies might provide information about:

- Your detailed rights as a crime victim
- Registering for an Offender Release Notification
- Receiving notification of the right under Pennsylvania Law to provide input regarding any release
- Victims compensation
- Advocacy
- Counseling/therapy
- The legal process
- Registering for court notifications
- Receiving notification of escape, recapture, or any custody change
- Court accompaniment
- Assistance with victim impact statements
- Understanding post-sentencing/dispositions
- Medical advocacy and accompaniment
- Receiving notification of execution

Resources

THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

TTY: 1-800-787-3224

PENNSYLVANIA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1-800-932-4632

TTY: 1-800-553-2508

www.pcadv.org

NATIONAL SEXUAL ABUSE HOTLINE

1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

PENNSYLVANIA COALITION AGAINST RAPE

1-800-692-7445

www.pcar.org

To see a listing of programs by county, visit the Pennsylvania Office of Victim's Services website: <http://pcv.pccd.pa.gov>.

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