

# THE VICTIMS' VOICE

January 2016 Newsletter



## ADVOCATE'S CORNER



Natasha M. Pierre, Esq.

A very happy New Year to you and yours! The OVA kicks off the year advocating legislatively for crime victims during the legislative session in February. This year's legislative priorities, which were developed in direct response to concerns raised by crime victims this past year, attempt to bolster crime victims' constitutional rights to be protected and obtain information during criminal proceedings ([access legislative priorities here](#) or visit [www.ct.gov/ova](http://www.ct.gov/ova)). In the Spring, the OVA will sponsor several events during the National Crime Victim Rights Week, including a 5K race, a public hearing in the community, and targeted trainings for law enforcement and advocates. The OVA looks forward to a new year of progress for crime victims in the State of Connecticut.

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### Real Life Issues: Elder Abuse

- 1 in 9 Americans over the age of 60 have experienced abuse
- 1 in 14 cases of elder abuse is reported
- 90% of the abusers are family members or caretakers of the victim

### What are some signs of elder abuse?

- Bruises, welts, black eyes, lacerations, and unhealed wounds
- Extremely withdrawn, non-communicative, or unresponsive
- Being emotionally upset or agitated
- Sudden changes in lifestyle, financial situation & character
- Hazardous or unsafe living conditions
- Poor personal hygiene

### What can older adults do to protect themselves?

1. Tell a trusted person about the abuse
2. Don't give away money or personal information
3. Have a trusted person review documents before you sign
4. Seek medical help when needed and tell the doctor if you are being mistreated

**To report cases of suspected abuse,  
Contact The CT Elder Abuse Hotline  
at 1-888-385-4225**

# 2016 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

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## THE OFFICE OF THE VICTIM ADVOCATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

*Below are summaries of the legislative proposals submitted by the Office of the Victim Advocate.*

### AN ACT CONCERNING A VICTIM'S RIGHT TO BE REASONABLY PROTECTED FROM THE ACCUSED

#### SECTION 1:

**Purpose:** Require the Commissioner of Emergency Services and Public Protection to provide written notification to a person, who is protected under an order of protection, that the respondent of the order has complied with the requirements to surrender, deliver or transfer any firearms as a result of the issuance of an order of protection.

#### SECTION 2:

**Purpose:** Require the defendant to surrender, deliver or transfer any firearms in the possession of the defendant when a defendant is granted entry into the Supervised Diversionary Program.

#### SECTION 3:

**Purpose:** Require the court, rather than the defendant, to provide notice to any victim of the crime when a defendant makes an application for the Accelerated Pretrial Rehabilitation Program.

### AN ACT CONCERNING A VICTIM'S RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE PROSECUTION

**Purpose:** Allow the victim to communicate directly with the State's Attorney in the Judicial District where the crime occurred whenever a prosecutor, after the investigation of the circumstances of a death, has declined to prosecute any person in connection with the death.

### AN ACT CONCERNING A VICTIM'S RIGHT TO OBJECT TO OR SUPPORT ANY PLEA AGREEMENT AND TO MAKE A STATEMENT TO THE COURT CONCERNING ANY PLEA AGREEMENT

**Purpose:** Eliminate the language that limits a victim's right to address the court regarding a plea agreement when the defendant pleads to a lesser offense than the offense originally charged.

### AN ACT CONCERNING A VICTIM'S RIGHT TO INFORMATION ABOUT THE ARREST, CONVICTION, SENTENCE, IMPRISONMENT AND RELEASE OF THE ACCUSED

**Purpose:** To ensure that crime victims are notified of and provided information about the arrest of an accused.



If you have an event that relates to crime victims or our community, share your event with us and we will share it too!

# Partners At Work: Highlighting CT Service Providers

## VICTIM RIGHTS CENTER OF CONNECTICUT, Inc.

Victim Rights Center of Connecticut (VRCCT) provides quality legal support to victims of sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, homicide, and violence against people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, regardless of income. VRCCT provides victim-focused services beyond those of the traditional criminal justice system but which are critical to protecting a survivor's rights, privacy and dignity.



**James G. Clark**  
Founder /  
Executive  
Director/  
Attorney

Clark prosecuted violent crimes in Connecticut for more than twenty years, serving and interacting with victims on a daily basis. Mr. Clark first served victims of crime in 1979 when he co-founded the first Temporary Restraining Order clinic for domestic violence victims in San Francisco. He founded VRCCT in July 2013. He is presently the Executive Director and Senior Attorney where his priority is the legal representation of his clients, most of whom are survivors of sexual assault. He also supervises two Associate Attorneys, Maura Crossin and Hannah Reischer as they ably represent victims of violent crime.

### We asked Jim and he answered!

#### **What do you want people to know most about VRCCT?**

VRCCT's mission is to provide quality, trauma-informed legal services to victims of: sexual assault, child abuse, violence against LGBT individuals, elder abuse, and homicide. Every victim of these crimes should have an attorney to help them through what the

Department of Justice has called "a perplexing maze of coexisting, overlapping, and complex legal issues after their victimization." Our three attorneys not only represent victims in criminal court, but also assist our clients with housing, employment, education (including Title IX), immigration, compensation and benefits issues. Our services are at no cost to our clients. We work closely with victim advocates and other service providers to offer victims a comprehensive plan of recovery.

#### **What obstacles do you face as a service provider?**

The biggest obstacle is that Connecticut's Constitutional Rights are often merely words, because there is no provision to remedy a violation of those rights. If a person's rights are violated in court, a victim has no remedy, only someone saying "Sorry about that." The Legislature can fix this problem with a very straight-forward bill that allows a victim to bring an action to correct any denial of those rights.

The second greatest obstacle is funding. Because our clients do not pay for representation, we have to raise enough money to operate. And like all non-profits, finding the donors who care about our mission takes a lot of time, and money is very tight. We are fortunate to have donated offices in Wallingford and very low overhead, but I worked for a year without a salary when we were just starting up.

#### **What do you see needs improving in Connecticut?**

Every law enforcement officer and every prosecutor needs to be trauma-informed. A majority of Connecticut's law enforcement



professionals are trained in trauma-informed response to complaints of violent crime, and treat victims with respect and sensitivity. VRCCT sees the exceptions, where the perpetrators of the crimes committed against these victims have not been arrested, either because police have not fully investigated the crimes or because police or prosecutors have failed to credit reports from victims who did not behave like a stereotypical "victim" of crime. These professionals want to get it right. If they received training in the ways that trauma affects a victim, and how to integrate that knowledge into their investigations, many more legitimate cases would reach the courts, and many more victims would feel comfortable with reporting to the police.

#### **What do you want our readers to know most?**

VRCCT exists to help victims of crime. We work with many agencies who have been helping crime victims for years without access to legal assistance. We want to connect with more social service and healthcare providers to increase the number of victims who find us and whose legal problems we can address. As I said before, every victim should have an attorney. We want to help.

# Victims Rights Enforcement Advisory Commission (VREAC)

On April 7, 2014, Governor Dannel Malloy announced the creation of the

Victims' Rights Enforcement Advisory Commission (VREAC) to review the current status of crime victims' rights in the State and to reports its findings and recommendations to the Governor in January 2015. The creation of VREAC was a direct response to crime victims' voicing their concerns about the lack of enforcement when their rights are violated. The Office of the Victim Advocate chaired and convened VREAC for monthly meetings from May 2014 to October 2015.

In the work of the commission, the VREAC identified nearly 100 statutory provisions within its review as well as nearly 50 agency written policies. In addition, the VREAC sought presentations from the Office of Victim Services, Judicial Branch; and the Department of Correction Victim Services Unit in an effort to understand the level of current services being provided to crime victims by those state entities.

The VREAC also sought a presentation from Doug Beloof, J.D.; Professor of Law, National Crime Victim Law Institute; Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Oregon. Attorney Beloof is a nationally recognized expert in the field of crime victims' rights and enforcement. Professor Beloof presented to the VREAC on September 17, 2014.

The presentation can be viewed at <http://ct-n.com/ondemand.asp?ID=10696?>.

Further, the VREAC held four public hearings across the state (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, and Norwich) to gain input from victims of crime regarding their experiences in the criminal justice process. Forty-three (43) victims of crime submitted oral or written testimony during these public hearings. *Appendix A* provides a summary of comments, feedback, recommendations, and written testimony.

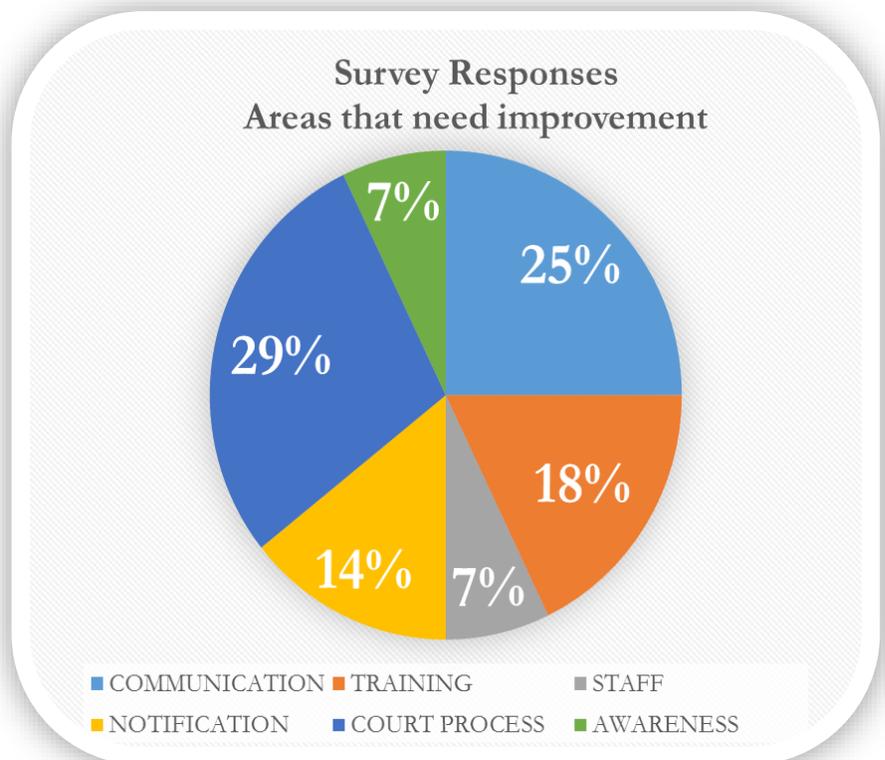
Finally, the VREAC disseminated a survey to the crime victim community in an effort to gain additional knowledge regarding

the experiences of crime victims throughout the criminal justice process. *Appendix B* provides the victim survey summary.

The Commission was confronted with the reality that, although Connecticut amended its constitution to provide crime victims with rights during the criminal justice process, the implementation of crime victims' rights varied across the state and across judicial districts.

Further, the Commission recognized that there are significant barriers to the enforcement of crime victims' rights embedded in the State Constitution as well as the Connecticut General Statutes.

To access the full report click [here](#) or visit [www.ct.gov/ova](http://www.ct.gov/ova)



National Crime Victims' Rights Week • April 10–16, 2016

Serving Victims

Building Trust

Restoring Hope

Join the OVA in promoting awareness of crime victims' rights and issues during National Crime Victims' Rights Week. This year's theme: Serving Victims. Building Trust. Restoring Hope. Highlights the importance of victim services in establishing trust to help victims through their journey of healing and recovery. Events TBA.

#NCVRW2016

## 20th Annual Conference

Melanie Ilene Rieger, a college student, was murdered by her boyfriend on May 24, 1994. This conference was established in her memory. The first Memorial Conference Against Violence was held in April of 1996 at Naugatuck Valley Community College in Waterbury, CT. Sam and Wanda Rieger are the parents of Melanie and have worked tirelessly in ensuring successful conferences in her memory over the past twenty years.

This year's conference **Past, Present, Future: A 20 year Journey of Support & Advocacy for Crime Victims** will take place June 15 & 16, 2016 at Central CT State University.

The MIR Conference acknowledges and promotes the importance of including crime victims in the planning of the Conference as well as concentrating on important issues. It has proven helpful the retention of presentations by crime victims detailing their stories and what they have done to overcome their tragedies to provide support for new crime victims and their healing journey.

"The thing that has touched me so much is the way the Conference impacts those who attend. It is a very

emotional and educational event which leaves a lasting impact on those who have attended. It has been an honor for Wanda and me to have met so many wonderful people over all these years. We have provided support to so many and so many have provided support to us. With everyone's help, we have kept Melanie "alive"; doing many of the things Melanie would have done for those less fortunate than she, had she been able to continue with her education and purpose in life. Thank you to all those who have supported us through this journey". —Mr. Sam Rieger.



The Conference provides a platform where crime victims and service providers and those in the criminal justice system can interact to provide improved support for crime victims and reduce the crime in our neighborhoods.

For more information regarding the 20th Annual Melanie Ilene Rieger Conference visit:  
[www.melanieriegerconference.com](http://www.melanieriegerconference.com)



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