



Crime victims deserve support

Crime in America has a devastating impact on victims and survivors, neighborhoods, and society as a whole. Crime threatens our individual and collective sense of safety and security, and creates a sense of indignity through the realization



Lucy Lee

that any of us, at any time, can be victimized by crime. April 21-27 is National Crime Victims Rights Week. This year's theme — New Challenges, New Solutions — pays tribute to the millions of crime victims trying to rebuild their shattered lives, and challenges us to help make our community a place for all citizens to be safe from crime. This is a time to reflect upon the many accomplishments that have made victims' rights and services a reality, and to recognize that justice isn't served until all crime victims are served.

There was a time when most crime victims were virtually unseen. Only 30 years ago crime victims had almost no rights, access to crime victim compensation or services to help rebuild their lives. They were often excluded from courtrooms, treated as an afterthought by the criminal justice system.

Today, through decades of advocacy and hard work, our nation has enacted crime victims' rights laws. Nationwide more than 10,000 victim service agencies help victims. Now the Victims of Crime Act, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act and the Violence Against Women Act provide a wide range of crime victim services that address victims' needs for information, protection, counseling and help in exercising their rights throughout the criminal justice system.

Victim assistance has grown to include programs that help victims of homicide, sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, drunken driving, elder abuse, child abuse, hate violence, terrorism and identity theft.

We can be proud that our community is a leader in this arena.

The Louisville Metro Criminal Justice Commission is one of the nation's oldest criminal justice planning agencies. It works to improve the administration of justice and promote public safety through planning, research, education and system-wide coordination of programs and initiatives in our communi-

ty. The commission has a long history of supporting victim-related issues, including promoting legislative changes and system improvements to help victims. I am proud to be the first board member appointed specifically to represent crime victims.

But Crime Victims' Rights Week reminds us there are still many challenges to ensuring that crime victims are treated with respect, recognized within our systems of justice, and afforded services to help them in the aftermath of crime. There are still crime victims who are not informed of their rights, or who are not engaged as active participants in the justice system.

There are still crime victims who remain unaware of the support services that can provide help, hope and healing in the aftermath of crime. There are still crime victims who suffer physical, emotional and financial losses.

Justice isn't served until all crime victims are treated with dignity and compassion.

Justice isn't served until all crime victims are informed of their rights throughout the justice process.

Justice isn't served until crime victims' most basic needs are identified, and efforts are made to meet these needs.

Justice isn't served until all crime victims can be assured that their offenders will be held accountable for their crimes.

Justice isn't served until we all realize that crime affects us all.

Every crime has a victim, and every victim needs our help. Victims' voices speak to us through their tragedy and pain. How can you respond?

» Learn more about agencies that serve crime victims and how they provide assistance to the community.

» Volunteer your time and/or challenge your faith or civic group to "adopt" an organization to assist.

» Donate to any of these organizations.

» Write your legislators asking them to fully fund the crime victim compensation fund and to support victim-related legislation.

During Crime Victims' Rights Week, and throughout the year, let us remember that by helping victims of crime, we help make our neighborhoods, communities and nation stronger and safer.

By serving crime victims, we are truly serving justice for all.

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