

New Directions from the Field:

Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century

Recommendations for Law Enforcement

The recommendations below, which appear in the May 1998 *New Directions* Report, have been reformatted for replication and distribution.

The significance of law enforcement's role in responding to crime victims cannot be overemphasized. The way that victims are treated by dispatchers, the first officers arriving at the scene of the crime, and detectives investigating the case shapes their expectations of how they will be treated throughout the justice process, and their overall opinions of justice officials. It is therefore critical that every law enforcement professional who interacts with crime victims, either in person or over the telephone, knows how to respond in a sensitive and effective manner. Because the range of services provided by law enforcement agencies across the Nation varies significantly, the following recommendations for the law enforcement community are set forth by the field:

1. Law enforcement agencies should adopt a community policing philosophy that is both victim and crime prevention oriented.
2. Law enforcement agencies should provide a basic level of support to crime victims through establishing victim assistance programs within their agencies and through community partnerships to ensure that victims have access to emergency services, counseling, financial assistance, information and referrals, and community programs.
3. Law enforcement agencies should establish policies for the provision of fundamental victims rights and services and procedures for their implementation. These policies and procedures should be disseminated in writing throughout the agency.
4. Compliance with victims' rights policies and procedures should be included as a standard in officers performance appraisals.
5. During their initial contact with law enforcement officers, victims of crime should receive verbal and written information about victims rights and services. Law enforcement personnel should be required to follow up with victims because many individuals are unable to comprehend assistance and compensation information in the aftermath of being severely traumatized.
6. All law enforcement agencies should adopt written policies and procedures and implement training programs for conducting sensitive and culturally appropriate death notification.
7. State, Federal, military, and Tribal law enforcement agencies must implement victims rights laws and ensure that victims are regularly notified of the status of the investigation, including arrests, pretrial release of suspects, and case closings.
8. Law enforcement should place a high priority on protecting victims and witnesses from intimidation and physical harm after they report a crime. Law enforcement agencies that operate jails or any temporary custody facilities should, upon request of the victim, immediately notify the victim of a defendants pretrial release.
9. All law enforcement personnel, from dispatchers through management, should receive initial and ongoing training about the impact of crime and how to respond sensitively and effectively to victims.
10. Police departments should develop specialized responses for family members of officers killed in the line of duty and protocols for responding to injured officers.
11. Law enforcement agencies should establish special protocols to ensure victim participation and confidence in the system when an officer is accused of a criminal offense.
12. Procedures for the swift return of property to victims and witnesses should be developed at the Federal, State, and local levels to serve as models for law enforcement agencies nationwide. Emergency funds should be made available to victims to replace essential items. Laws providing victims the right to have their property returned within a reasonable period of time should be enacted in all States and on the Federal level.