

Sample Speech

What a special time this is for all of us! During the 18th commemoration of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, we join together with our brothers and sisters across the nation in honoring those who bring honor to victims. And the honors are well deserved, for the tireless victims and advocates; the sensitive law enforcement, prosecution, judicial, and corrections professionals; the clergy members who help replace despair with hope; and the countless others who volunteer for victims. These are the warriors not only against crime, but also for the 37 million people in America who are touched by crime each year.

What *is right for America* is the extension of rights to one of our most vulnerable populations -- victims of crime -- young and old, urban and rural, and diverse by race, religion and gender. The determination and commitment of victims and those who serve them have reaped impressive results since the victims' rights discipline began in America more than two decades ago: over 30,000 state and federal laws have been passed that protect and enforce victims' rights, including constitutional amendments for victims' rights in 29 states; there are over 10,000 non-profit and justice system-based programs that provide support and services to victims of crime; and a federal constitutional amendment that would provide balance and consistency for the legal rights of victims is currently pending in Congress.

Here in (your community or state), we have enjoyed many successes on behalf of crime victims over the past year. (List key successes here). While we join together this week to celebrate these successes, we can never truly declare victory until each and every victim is treated with dignity and respect, not only by our citizenry, but also by helping professionals in the fields of medicine, law, religion, mental health, and others. We can never declare victory until every criminal and juvenile justice system across our nation is open to victims, providing opportunities for information, input, and involvement. And we can never declare victory until our partnerships with our justice systems reap the fruits of protection, notification, and restitution for every victim who requests these vital rights.

Nearly everyone in our community has been touched, either directly or indirectly, by crime. When one person is hurt by crime -- a family member or friend, neighbor or co-worker - - our sense of safety and security is shattered. That's why today, as never before, victims' rights are *right for America*, and *right for (name of your city/county/state)*. That's also why today, as never before, we must continue our valiant efforts to balance the rights and interests of victims, the community, and offenders.

We have learned much in the past quarter century. We know *we possess the ability to help victims regain a sense of control and power* in the aftermath of crime. Our efforts have resulted in significant changes in societal attitudes toward victims -- from judging, blaming and second-guessing to, in many cases, understanding and respect. We are positive that the 30,000 laws we've passed that protect and restore victims' rights are making authentic justice for victims a reality in our criminal and juvenile justice systems. And we know that if, in just a decade, we are capable of passing 29 state constitutional amendments for victims' rights, we are capable of guaranteeing victims' rights in our most hallowed document -- the *U.S. Constitution*.

Simply put, we know that *victims' rights are right for America*. For a nation founded upon the principles of liberty and justice *for all*, we as a society are finally acknowledging that "for all" *also* applies to victims of crime. And when the applications of "justice for all" truly work, *we all win*. *We all* must be committed to moving victims' rights beyond rhetoric to reality. *We all* are touched when innocent crime victims -- a young child, or a frail elderly person, or a woman who lives in fear for her own and her children's lives -- are buoyed by the beacon of help and hope that we, together, provide. And *we all* are victorious when our collective efforts result in one less person being victimized.

Indeed, victims' rights are *right for America* and *right for (your community)*. Today, in honoring victims and those who serve them, I honor you. Your commitment and passion about victims' rights and services are what keeps this movement vital and strong. Your willingness to not only confront, but work to change problems resulting from a lack of funding and human resources, as well as attitudes based on fear, frustration and stereotypical thinking, is inspirational and effective. And your participation here today is a message that the time has come for true justice to become part of our very existence here in (state).

I thank you all for the tireless and heroic work you do each and every day on behalf of crime victims in our community and, ultimately, everywhere. Together, we can volunteer to assist crime victims in any number of ways -- by working on a hotline, helping out at a shelter, advocating for changes in legislation and public policy. Together, let us move steadfastly forward in this struggle for what *is right*, and let us continue to bolster each other with courage and hope in our efforts to educate others and proclaim to one and all that *victims' rights are, indeed, right for America!*