

# Texas Attorney General Pushes Victim Rights, Compensation



By Greg Abbott  
Attorney General of Texas

The Crime Victims' Compensation Fund was created in 1979 by the Texas Legislature with the passage of the Crime Victims' Compensation Act. This Act set out the protocol for victim eligibility and outlined the first benefits available to victims of crime. Since 1991, the Compensation Fund has been administered by the Office of the Attorney General.

During my tenure as Attorney General of Texas, I intend to make crime victim services a top priority and a resounding success. The key to success is focusing on the victim and the victim's needs. While each victim faces trauma and loss, no two experiences are the same. We recognize these differences and work hard to meet the specific needs of each eligible victim or claimant.

In the years that the Attorney General's office has been responsible for Crime Victims' Compensation, the array of services we offer has ex-

panded significantly. Our Crime Victim Services (CVS) Division today is responsible for a number of functional areas.

First and foremost, we accept applications from victims of violent crime, to determine which costs resulting from the crime may be eligible for reimbursement by the Fund. Victims or their family members must meet some basic eligibility requirements. Expenses that qualify include medical expenses, counseling, lost wages, and the cost of funerals in the case of homicides.

CVS also conducts research on the impact of crime and on the need for services, and provides training for local crime victim service providers and for the victim liaisons in law enforcement and prosecutors' offices. In addition, the division administers grants to local victim service providers and sexual assault programs.

To help ensure that victims of sexual assault are treated with dignity and compassion, we train Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs), who gather evidence without retraumatizing the victims. An equally important part of their training is forensic.

We want to end sexual assault by effectively prosecuting sexual predators.

Our Crime Victim Notification System (CVNS) exists to protect and inform victims when the offenders' crimes proceed through the criminal justice system and the offenders come up for parole or release. Accessible and reliable notification can help restore a victim's sense of safety and control.

The rights to be informed and heard, protected and compensated are all guaranteed under the Crime Victims' "Bill of Rights" (Art. 56, Texas Code of Criminal Procedure). Our job is twofold: to see that victims know their rights and to build communities that respect their rights.

My own commitment is to lead our state's law enforcement and criminal justice professionals in advocating for victim rights and services. I hope you will join me in this effort.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER CRIME VICTIM RIGHTS IN TEXAS

- To be protected from further harm or threats for cooperating with prosecution efforts
- To have the victim's safety considered in the setting of bail
- To be informed about relevant court proceedings
- To be informed about a defendant's right to bail and the procedures in a criminal investigation
- To be heard at the time of sentencing and parole, about the impact of the offense
- To be informed about the Crime Victims' Compensation Program
- To be informed about parole and notified upon the release of the defendant
- To have a separate and secure waiting area for witnesses at a trial
- To the prompt return of property held as evidence when it is no longer required
- To have an employer notified if testimony requires absence from work
- To counseling about acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS/HIV)
- To be present at all court proceedings related to the offense, subject to judge's approval
- To be informed about these rights



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