

# Attorney General Offers Help for Victims of Crime



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On November 23, 2000, a mother of five was following her parents and two of her children home after having Thanksgiving dinner at a relative's house. To her horror, she watched as a drunk driver slammed into the side of her parents' car, knocking them and her children off the road. When the woman reached the car, she found all four of her family members dead.

There is very little anyone can do to help repair this kind of terrible damage. However, the Office of the Attorney General does have a Crime Victims' Compensation Program that may assist with at least the financial burdens that result from violent crime.

It is a well known fact that criminals have many rights. But what about victims? Do they have rights? They most certainly do. Victims of violent crime have many rights, including the right to compensation for certain losses caused by the crime.

This right was established by the Texas Legislature in the Crime Victims' Compensation Act of 1979. The Act established a fund

for victims and family members of victims to help pay for expenses such as medical bills, counseling and funeral costs incurred as a result of certain criminal acts.

Money for the fund comes directly from people who break the law, through court costs and other fees. The Crime Victims' Compensation Division of the Office of the Attorney General administers this program for the State of Texas. Eligible victims or family members of victims can apply for benefits. Not all victims of crime qualify, however. Certain requirements and qualifications must be met.

The crime must occur in Texas and the victim must be a Texas resident or a U.S. resident, or the crime must involve a Texas resident who was victimized in another state or country where crime victim benefits are not offered.

The crime must be reported in a reasonable amount of time to the appropriate law enforcement agency, but not so late as to hamper the investigation or prosecution of the criminal offense. The victim and/or claimant must cooperate with law enforcement in the investigation and prosecution of the case.

The victim must file a claim for compensation within three years of the date of the crime. Time extensions are available for good cause,

such as victim age or physical or mental incapacity of the victim.

Persons not eligible for benefits include a claimant or victim who:

- knowingly or willingly participated in the crime;
- is the offender or an accomplice of the offender;
- was incarcerated or on probation or parole at the time of the crime; or
- knowingly submits false or forged documents to the Office of the Attorney General.

Crimes covered by the program involve criminally injurious conduct, which includes sex offenses, kidnapping, aggravated robbery, assaultive offenses, arson, homicide, and other violent crimes in which the victim suffers physical or emotional harm. Vehicle-related crimes such as failure to stop and render aid, DWI and intoxication manslaughter are also covered.

Every law enforcement agency in Texas is required to provide crime victims with information about the program and an application. Applications are also available through your local prosecutor's office. That office should have a crime victim coordinator who can assist with the application process. Certain hospitals and medical centers may also have applications.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

### VICTIMS' RIGHTS

- Victims of violent crimes have the right to compensation!
- The crime must occur in Texas to a Texas resident. (Certain exceptions apply)
- You must report the crime within a reasonable amount of time.
- You must apply within three years of the crime. (Certain exceptions apply)
- You must cooperate with the investigation and prosecution by law enforcement.
- You may be eligible for benefits even if the crime has not been solved or the suspect convicted.
- Contact local law enforcement for assistance, or
- Request an application by calling

The Office of the Attorney General  
Crime Victims' Compensation Division  
(800) 983-9933

For more information, visit our Web site  
at [www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us).



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Attorney General's Web site at [www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us).