



# " JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS, JUSTICE FOR ALL "

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

IN THE AFTERMATH OF VIOLENT crime, survivors and their loved ones often discover a new sense of inner strength. Many crime victims find that life is not only about how we are challenged, but how we respond to those challenges. One shining example of survivor courage is Pam Lychner, a Houston woman who became an advocate for crime victims' rights after a career sex offender attacked her in 1990.

Pam Lychner was working as a real estate agent in Houston when she received a telephone call from a man who asked to see a vacant house. After arriving at the house, Pam was attacked by a workman from the company she had hired to clean the residence. Pam's husband, who had accompanied her to the showing and was waiting for her in another room, rushed to help her. He restrained the assailant until law enforcement officers arrived. The attacker was arrested, convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Pam's attacker turned out to be a convicted rapist and child molester, who had been released from state prison under a then-mandatory early release policy designed to ease prison overcrowding. While in prison, the assailant filed a civil lawsuit against the Lychners, seeking damages for "psychological injuries" he suffered during the struggle. Back then, I was a trial court judge in Houston, and when the attacker's frivolous lawsuit landed in my court, I promptly dismissed it.

Just two years into the assailant's prison term, the state parole board informed the Lychners that Pam's attacker was a candidate for early release. Pam's outrage spurred her

to begin meeting and working with other survivors of violent crime. In 1993, Pam and two other women founded a nonprofit organization called Justice for All to fight for criminal justice reform and crime victims' rights.

In the years since, Justice for All has worked tirelessly to give a voice to Texas crime victims and the loved ones left behind. Among its achievements, the group successfully fought to repeal mandatory release laws. Justice for All also worked to curb inmates' frivolous lawsuits against victims; won the right for relatives of murder victims to attend executions; and helped establish a national sex offender registry to help states track and manage released sex offenders.

Perhaps most importantly, Justice for All helps crime victims and their families understand the rights afforded them by the Texas criminal justice system. One of the fundamental rights of crime victims in Texas is the right to compensation.

Every law enforcement agency in Texas is required to provide crime victims with information about the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund and an application for financial assistance. Applications also may be available at local hospitals and medical centers. Victims and survivors can also contact the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) directly for an application.

The Texas Legislature established the Fund to help victims and their families who cannot afford to pay the financial cost of crime. The Fund receives its money from fees, court costs and restitution paid by those

convicted of a felony or misdemeanor in a state court. When eligible victims and their families have exhausted all other means of financial support, the Fund helps them offset the expenses they incurred because of violent crime.

Last year, the OAG, which administers the Fund, received more than 37,000 applications for assistance and awarded more than \$65 million in benefits to victims and their families. We also distributed nearly \$36 million in grants to nonprofit organizations and public entities that provide emergency shelter, crisis counseling, court accompaniment and other victim assistance.

Violent crime is often accompanied by extraordinary physical, emotional and financial suffering. Yet, countless crime victims turn these senseless acts of violence into positive changes in their lives. It is a testimony to the human spirit's resilience that so many crime victims discover a new outlook on life.

Tragically, Pam Lychner perished in the 1996 crash of TWA Flight 800 in New York. But Pam's strength and courage will never be forgotten, for her legacy lives on today through the continued advocacy work of Justice for All.

This year's National Crime Victims' Rights Week is appropriately named "Justice for Victims, Justice for All." I encourage all Texans to observe this important week by participating in community events that honor victims and survivors of crime, and take a moment to think about Pam Lychner, who taught us all how to win the fight for crime victims' rights.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER



### CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS

The Crime Victims' Compensation Fund reimburses out-of-pocket expenses to victims of violent crime and their families. Expenses covered by the Fund may include:

- funeral costs
- medical and counseling costs
- child care
- relocation expenses for sexual assault victims attacked in their homes and for family violence victims

For more information on the Office of the Attorney General's Crime Victims' Compensation Program, contact:

### CRIME VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION Office of the Attorney General

Monday – Friday  
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Toll Free: (800) 983-9933  
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### JUSTICE FOR ALL

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For more information about this and other topics, visit the Office of the Attorney General online at [www.texasattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov).



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