

CRIME SURVIVORS

SPEAK

TEXAS VICTIMS'
EXPERIENCES
WITH **RECOVERY**
AND VIEWS ON
CRIMINAL JUSTICE

ALLIANCE FOR
SAFETY AND JUSTICE





INTRODUCTION

Protecting victims of crime and promoting public safety is the most important function of Texas' criminal justice system. It is therefore essential to consider the experiences and perspectives of crime survivors when determining safety and justice policy.

Because comprehensive data hasn't been available, the public safety debate in Texas has had to rely on anecdote rather than data when it comes to the views and needs of those most negatively impacted by crime and violence: victims.

To fill this gap, the Alliance for Safety and Justice commissioned a survey of Texas crime survivors. Conducted in February 2019, this groundbreaking study by David Binder Research¹ highlights the myriad ways in which Texas crime survivors are impacted by crime, what they need from the criminal justice system to recover and heal, and how state policy can better align with their safety priorities.

The results provide surprising insight regarding victims' views on safety and justice policy. Contrary to what many expect to be the position of victims of crime, the vast majority of crime survivors in Texas support changes to the justice system that would increase rehabilitation.

Crime victims want accountability, but they also believe current justice system policies make it more likely someone will commit crimes in the future. They would prefer that the criminal justice system do more to stop crime before it happens. In a national survey, the Alliance for Safety and Justice found:

- **By a 2 to 1 margin**, victims prefer that the criminal justice system focus more on rehabilitating people who commit crimes than punishing them.
- **6 in 10 victims** prefer shorter prison sentences and more spending on prevention and rehabilitation to prison sentences that keep people in prison for as long as possible.
- **By a margin of 3 to 1**, victims prefer holding people accountable through options beyond just prison, such as rehabilitation, mental health treatment, drug treatment, community supervision, or community service.

In Texas, the largest number of people sentenced for crimes who could benefit from rehabilitation are under community supervision in the probation system. Victims in Texas prefer options, such as changes to the probation system, that would incentivize people to rehabilitate themselves and break the cycle of crime. Victims advocates also want to ensure more survivors are accessing healing and support services through victim compensation.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOW DOES CRIME IMPACT TEXAS VICTIMS?



- ✓ **4 in 10 Texans (41 percent)** have been a victim of a crime in the past ten years.
- ✓ Victims of violent crime are more likely to be **low-income, young, and people of color.**
- ✓ **7 in 10 violent crime victims** have been victims more than once.

Crime is a traumatic experience for most victims.

- ✓ **7 out of 10** victims of crime describe the experience as traumatic, and majorities of victims experienced stress (more than 8 in 10), anxiety (7 in 10), fear (6 in 10), and had trouble sleeping (6 in 10) after the incident.



- ✓ **More than a third (36 to 38 percent)** of victims had trouble with school or work or physical and medical issues after the incident.

Victims face challenges accessing compensation.

- ✓ **6 in 10** violent crime victims were unaware that the state of Texas offers victims compensation, and less than **1 out of 10** (9 percent) ever received it.



WHAT ARE VICTIMS' PERSPECTIVES ON SAFETY AND JUSTICE ISSUES?

Victims support increasing incentives for, and reducing barriers to, rehabilitation.



- ✓ Crime victims support various approaches that would ensure people sentenced to probation have the tools and incentives to rehabilitate themselves and that would reduce recidivism.

- ✓ About **7 out of 10** crime survivors support strengthening incentives for those sentenced to probation to complete rehabilitative programs (**69%**), and ensuring that someone's inability to pay probation fees and fines does not interfere with rehabilitative efforts (**74%**).

- ✓ About **8 out of 10** of victims support increasing the use of punishments other than jail time for probation violations. More than **8 out of 10** victims support changing the way probation is funded so more attention and treatment can be directed to those on probation early on.





RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this first-of-its-kind study of Texas crime victims point to several key recommendations for lawmakers and stakeholders on how the justice system can be changed so that there are fewer victims, and safer communities.

Key recommendations include:

1

INCREASE AWARENESS AND ACCESS, AND REDUCE BARRIERS TO COMPENSATION FOR VICTIMS.

Stakeholders should work with crime survivors to ensure victims know they are eligible for help through stepped up public awareness efforts. Stakeholders should also support organizations that help victims successfully complete and file applications, and increase awareness that exceptions may still allow survivors to access help after deadlines have passed.

2

MAKE CHANGES TO THE PROBATION SYSTEM TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM.

Lawmakers should strengthen incentives for people sentenced to probation for crimes to complete rehabilitative programs. Lawmakers should also strengthen the process where a judge can determine someone's ability to pay fines, fees, or court costs to help reduce recidivism, reduce crime, and reduce the number of victims overall.

3

CONDUCT REGULAR VICTIMIZATION STUDIES IN TEXAS.

More data and research is needed to advance policies that are responsive to and effectively meet victims' needs. By regularly surveying victims, the state can best identify the policies and practices that will best protect victims, stop the cycle of crime, and help survivors recover from victimization.

4

INVEST IN EVIDENCED-BASED SERVICES THAT PROTECT VICTIMS AND STOP THE CYCLE OF CRIME.

A growing body of research demonstrates that untreated trauma, especially among those who experience repeat victimization, can contribute to substance abuse, mental health issues, housing instability, and other problems that increase risky behaviors and lead to further victimization or crime itself. Trauma recovery centers, and other programs that provide wraparound services, can stop this cycle by providing access to treatment, referrals, and other forms of assistance.