



# NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS

## AGENDA **2021**

**A PLAN TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS  
OF OUR NATION'S DIVERSE VICTIMS OF CRIME**



CRIME SURVIVORS FOR  
SAFETY AND JUSTICE

ALLIANCE FOR  
SAFETY AND JUSTICE



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction and Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Victims Of Violent Crime: A Hidden Public Health Crisis</b>	<b>7</b>
Challenges In Addressing Victims' Needs	9
<i>Elizabeth and Carlos: We needed counseling and therapy, but we had no advocate telling us how to get help</i>	13
<b>National Crime Victims Agenda</b>	<b>14</b>
Expand Victims' Rights	15
<i>Lisa: My family was disqualified from receiving the financial and counseling assistance we needed</i>	16
End Discrimination	17
<i>Kimesha: I received no support or counseling from the criminal justice system</i>	19
Ensure More Urgent Help, Less Red Tape	20
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Advancing Changes to Address the Needs of Underserved Crime Victims</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Key Reports</b>	<b>28</b>



**CRIME SURVIVORS FOR  
SAFETY AND JUSTICE**

## **About Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice**

Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice is a national network of crime survivors joining together to create healing communities and shape public safety policy. We are a flagship program of Alliance for Safety and Justice.

With over 46,000 members and growing, including chapters and leaders across the country, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice is building a movement to heal together and promote public safety policies that help the people and communities most harmed by crime and violence.

# INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite substantial increases in criminal justice expenditure over the last three decades, the majority of crime survivors do not receive support to recover from harm, and they experience a wide range of negative impacts. In 2018, more than 3 million Americans were the victim of at least one violent crime. While nearly 8 out of 10 survivors say their life has been affected by a crime, fewer than 1 in 3 receive the kind of help they need to recover and stabilize.

As efforts to reform the criminal justice system grow nationwide, it has never been more important to envision new approaches to safety and justice that meet the needs of crime victims, especially those that are most harmed and least helped. Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice represents 46,000 survivors from across the country and regularly surveys representative groups of survivors to understand their needs. In our *National Victims Agenda*, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice offers policymakers a plan to address the needs of diverse survivors of crime and stop the cycle.

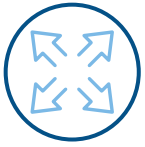


 **CRIME SURVIVORS FOR  
SAFETY AND JUSTICE**

**ADVANCING CHANGES  
TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS  
OF UNDERSERVED  
CRIME SURVIVORS**

 **WASHINGTON D.C.**

 **CHANGES TO LAW**     **CHANGES TO BUDGETS**     **CHANGES TO PRACTICES**



## EXPAND VICTIMS' RIGHTS

### **1 Increase legal protections for victims to prevent job and housing loss while victims are recovering from a crime:**

In each state, some legal protection already exists to prevent victims from losing their housing or employment while recovering from traumatic stress, but these protections are limited and need to be strengthened. Regulations relating to extended employment leave policy, housing payment assistance, emergency lock changes or related matters should be reviewed and expanded to ensure as many victims as possible can maintain employment and housing stability in times of crisis.

**2 Expand victims' civil legal services to help victims stabilize:** A host of legal issues can arise in the aftermath of crime, but the legal system is very difficult to navigate, especially for people in crisis. Civil legal services programs reduce the burden on victims and help victims stabilize their lives. These vital services provide legal support for everything from housing and employment matters to restraining orders and medical, immigration, or family law assistance. However, too few victims are aware of or are able to access these vital services. Policymakers should ensure the establishment of victims' legal services that can reach all victims who are in need of legal assistance. Widespread public education is also crucial to ensure victims become aware of—and able to access—these services, in their communities and in culturally and linguistically appropriate settings.

**3 Ensure dignity, respect, and support for the victims of unsolved crimes:** The majority of crime goes unsolved. Too often, the only survivors that obtain information or help from the justice system are those for whom an arrest or prosecution is underway or has occurred. In part, victims and surviving family members of unsolved crimes can often suffer extreme stress and chronic trauma, arising from not having information about the crime or knowing what happened or why it happened. These survivors have rights, too. The criminal justice system should ensure dignity and support for all victims of crime. Justice system officials should ensure responsivity to these survivors, treat these victims with respect, and ensure they are connected to the appropriate recovery services and support.



## END DISCRIMINATION

**4 Expand victim services eligibility to all victims of crime and violence:** While important benefits and protections for victims exist in many states, such as victim compensation, those benefits and protections are not readily available to all crime survivors. Current bureaucratic processes and unfair eligibility regulations exclude too many people harmed by violent crime from accessing victim services in their time of need. Policymakers must end discriminatory rules or practices that treat victims differently depending on their status or demographics. Expanding eligibility to services and compensation to all victims is crucial to support healing and stop trauma cycles. This includes ending eligibility exclusions that effectively blame victims for their own victimization and bar eligibility to witnesses of violence, family members of violence victims, people with prior criminal records or who are on probation or parole, and victims of police violence. Eligibility determination requirements should also not require the provision of police reports when other types of reliable documentation are available.

**5 Ensure equal access to compensation and services:** While people from all walks of life are impacted by crime and violence, its impact is also concentrated and unequal. Services are not universally available, and eligibility restrictions result in disproportionate denials of compensation or services to victims of color. Victims of color also report experiencing significant difficulty obtaining access to recovery services, irrespective of whether or not a benefits application was approved. Policymakers must track and publish data by race and other key demographics on denial or approval rates of compensation applications and victim access to services, and immediately address disparities in application approvals or access to services to ensure equal access to help for all. Policymakers should establish survivor advisory councils to review the data and information collected, and set appropriate policies to address the findings.



## ENSURE MORE URGENT HELP, LESS RED TAPE

**6 Reach more survivors in crisis—and faster:** The majority of crime survivors have never heard of victims' compensation or other benefits programs designed to help victims stabilize. Policymakers must expand outreach programs and ensure those programs are available in multiple languages, through multiple platforms, and delivered in all the places that underserved survivors may frequent. Everyone who works with victims of crime on a daily basis, including law enforcement, service providers, and health professionals, should be trained to understand how to access help, the civil legal protections that exist, and how to ensure victims can access help. Even once aware of the available benefits, many survivors still report being unable to access them because the response time for meeting their urgent needs is too slow. Overly bureaucratic processes and protocols can mean that people don't get the help they need when they need it. Emergency financial support should be made available as broadly as possible and should be processed quickly so people can get timely help, while non-emergency applications for help should also be resolved within a reasonable amount of time.

**7 Cover actual costs of recovery and extend deadlines for help:** Aid designated for victims to help with recovery and/or bereavement should be meaningful enough to cover the actual costs that victims incur. Policymakers should increase benefits designated to help victims recover to match the actual costs of grieving and recovery for a wide range of victims. Policymakers should also ensure that benefits fully cover burial expenses and funerals and should expand outreach for this benefit. Recognizing that navigating trauma is difficult and can take years, especially if a person is harmed as a child or youth, policymakers need to extend the deadlines to apply for aid to ensure more victims can access help and to account for the slow process of recovering from trauma.

**8 Ensure trauma recovery services are widely available:** The vast majority of survivors of violence, especially repeat violence, experience one or more symptoms of trauma. Unaddressed trauma can cause a lifetime of debilitating outcomes for people's physical health, mental health, and economic stability. The solutions do exist—but they are not supported at scale to reach and support the number of people in need. Model trauma recovery programs that provide wraparound case management and mental health support as well as peer-to-peer support can help survivors heal. Policymakers must expand the number of Trauma Recovery Centers and expand trauma support programs in schools to reach children and youth traumatized by violence. Providing survivors with a real opportunity to recover from trauma should be a fundamental goal of our public safety systems.

**9 Invest in community-based victim services providers:** People turn to family, friends, trusted local leaders, and community-based local support services in times of crisis. That's where the vast majority of survivors of violence and crime go to for help. Yet, community programs often struggle to stay open and meet the needs for services, especially in times of crisis. Culturally competent community-based programs rooted in neighborhoods that experience concentrated violence and crime need to be supported with multi-year flexible funding and sufficient resources to meet their needs, and should be scaled up across the country. Public agencies that distribute victim services funds should prioritize community-based organizations with a strong track record and community ties. Specialized requests for proposals should be expanded to increase funding opportunities for these organizations, and resource sharing between established providers and newer organizations should be encouraged. The application processes to disperse funds to community-based organizations and reimbursement processes governing how these organizations are funded must become more user-friendly. It should be the mission of every government agency that works with victims to eliminate any barriers to resources reaching the organizations with the most community credibility and connection.

**10 Fund urgent crisis needs—now:** In the context of the current global pandemic, many millions of people are in acute crisis and less support is available. Homicide and violence rates have increased, a predictable outcome of large-scale occurrences of job loss, school closures, food and housing insecurity, and loss of life arising from COVID-19. At the same time, frontline crisis-assistance service providers have either been forced to close or are operating with limited capacity. Policymakers should provide substantially increased investment to frontline service providers to help quell the violence and get survivors the crisis-assistance support they need, and should increase the allocation of state general fund dollars to victims compensation programs and the other state grant programs to meet the true community victimization needs. Policymakers should increase the flexible, general support dollars available to community-based crisis-assistance providers and provide immediate flexible cash assistance to survivors to meet their basic needs. Laws, budgets, and practices must increase the ability to leverage federal grants to ensure funding is available to community-based organizations providing critical services.

# VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME: A HIDDEN PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Every year a significant number of Americans are victimized in violent crimes. In 2018 alone, federal data show that more than 3 million Americans<sup>1</sup>—were the victim of at least one violent crime.


The harm and trauma victims experience in the wake of a violent incident can run deep. Left unaddressed, this painful trauma can have devastating lifelong effects, contributing to mental and physical health challenges that can make it difficult for people to return to their work, their families, and the life they once knew.<sup>2</sup>

Victims often face exorbitant out-of-pocket costs for ongoing medical and mental healthcare needs arising from victimization, including treatment for coping issues that arise when recovery is not supported, such as substance abuse. In some cases, they are forced to incur relocation costs when their homes become unsafe and they cannot obtain financial support to move. Every year, victimization also costs employers, government programs, and insurers that pay directly—or indirectly—for services, costing the economy hundreds of billions of dollars a year.<sup>3</sup>

## For most survivors, help is out of reach

Despite the life-altering harmful impacts of violence, very few survivors receive any help at all in the aftermath of crime. Fewer than 1 in 3 survivors report receiving help during their recovery, such as financial, medical, mental health, or civil legal assistance.<sup>4</sup> Thirty six percent of victims report that they would have wanted, but did not receive, emergency or temporary housing. Nearly half who wanted financial assistance with damaged property or monetary losses did not receive it.

Morally and fiscally, this makes no sense. Ensuring all victims of crime can recover, regain health, and stabilize should be a top priority for our safety, health, and justice systems.

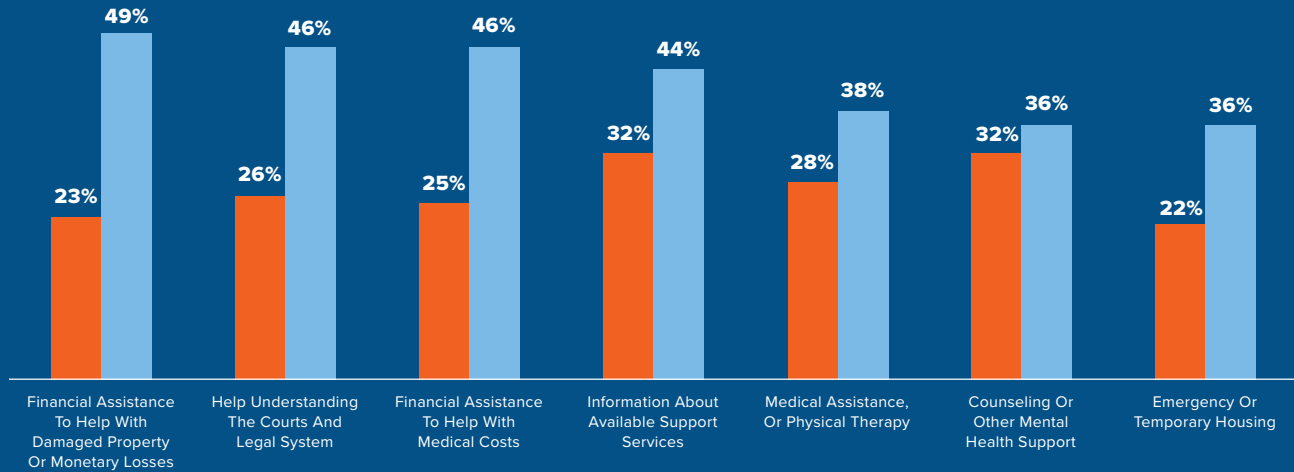
**50%**   
of crime victims will suffer  
post-traumatic stress  
without treatment.<sup>5</sup>

More than  
**3 MILLION**   
Americans are the victim of at least one violent  
crime in a year, and yet fewer than 1 in 3 survivors  
report receiving help during their recovery.

## Crime victims would have wanted specific services, but fewer than one in three received them.

Below is a list of the types of support that victims of crime may receive. For each, please indicate if it is something you have ever received, and if you never received it please indicate if you would want it if it were available.

■ Have Received  
■ Never Received, Would Have Wanted



From Alliance for Safety and Justice. (2020). *Toward shared safety: The first-ever national survey of America's safety gaps.*

### People of color experience higher rates of crime

A four-decade review of the national data reveals that vulnerability to being harmed by violence occurring to Black Americans was roughly 1.5–2 times greater than that of whites, while the risk among Latinos was roughly 1.2–1.5 times greater than that of whites.<sup>6</sup> Disparities in who is a violent crime victim have also been documented, state by state; for example, surveys in Illinois and Michigan found people of color were 26 percent more likely than whites to have been the victim of violent crime.<sup>7</sup>

### Young people experience the most crime

Some of the largest disparities in victimization relate to a person's age. According to federal data, people aged 18–24 years old experience crime at nearly twice the rate of any other age group,<sup>8</sup> and a recent survey of survivors found that people under the age of 45 are three times more likely to be victims of violent crime than people over the age of 45.<sup>9</sup>

### People in low-income communities experience the most crime

There are also large disparities across economic groups. Overall, those with the lowest income experience violence at twice the rate of those with the highest income.<sup>10</sup> The results of one study found that the rate of victimization among individuals with family incomes of less than \$15,000 was over three times the rate of those with family incomes of \$75,000 or more.<sup>11</sup>

Income, age, and race together increase the likelihood someone will be harmed: Overall vulnerability to experiencing violence is highest among persons who are younger, male, Black, living in the poorest households, and living in urban areas.<sup>12</sup> Black males under the aged of 35 in urban households earning under \$25,000 face the greatest vulnerability of serious violent victimization.<sup>13</sup>

### Survivors of violent crime are the most likely to experience repeat victimization

Repeat crime victims bear a sharply disproportionate share of the impact of crime and violence. People who have been the victim of a violent crime are more than four times as likely to have been victimized four or more times.<sup>14</sup>



# CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING VICTIMS' NEEDS

In the last four decades, victims of crime have won more legal rights and investments in victim services than ever before. State constitutional amendments recognizing victims' rights and state compensation programs that provide financial help to victims for recovery have emerged across the country. Federal investments in victim support have increased, and national awareness of the impacts of trauma on life outcomes has grown.

Despite these new laws, investments, and understandings, the majority of people harmed by violence lack access to the support needed to recover from trauma and loss and stay safe. It has never been more important to confront this continued reality. By coming to terms with the gaps—all of the ways in which most victims do not benefit from the new programs, investments, and legal protections—public officials can change course and prioritize starting to serve many more people in need.

**Compensation programs:** Every state has a victim compensation program. These programs provide direct financial reimbursement to a victim for an expense that resulted from a crime, such as medical costs, lost wages, counseling, or funeral costs.

**Specialized victim services:** A victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or another specific crime may be able to receive help through a specific program. They may also be able to get help with a specific service they need because of the crime, such as housing, if they are fleeing abuse.



**Legal protections:** There are also some legal protections, like those that cover some victims to take leave from a job if they work for a large enough employer covered by these protections, or to break a lease if that protection is covered under state law.

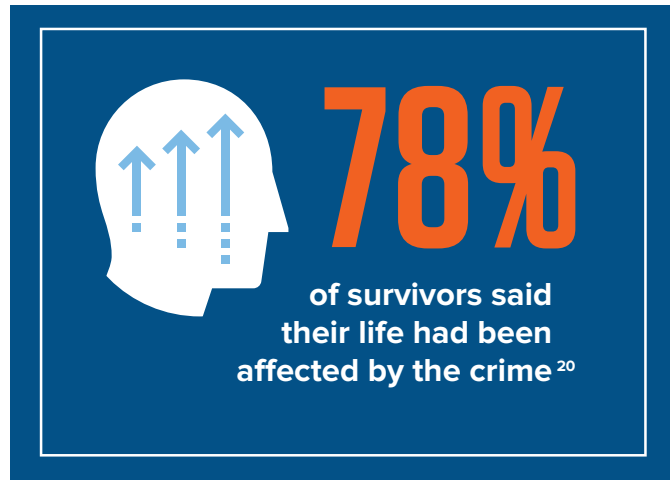
Despite the intent of these programs, their reach and impact are limited by laws, practices, and decisions around funding, leaving millions of victims' lives permanently impacted by trauma, and entire communities suffering costs into the hundreds of billions of dollars.

**More than half of victims never report the crime to law enforcement—a critical part of whether the survivor can access aid.**

### Barriers to financial support

Victims compensation benefits do not cover all the needs the victim has to become whole again, such as fully covering wages lost when someone needs to take time off work to recover, or fully covering someone's health needs if medical insurance does not cover a needed service.<sup>16</sup>

Compensation benefits are often directly linked to whether the survivor reports the crime to law enforcement, which generally happens only about half the time generally<sup>17</sup>—and less often in communities of color and low-income communities where trust gaps with public systems are significant. Because aid is linked to whether one reports the crime—because that is the door one must walk through—victims are often unaware that support exists in the first place.<sup>18</sup> This is one reason why about **90 percent of victims of violent crime do not receive any direct assistance from a victim service agency.**<sup>19</sup>



Even if a survivor does learn about the process to get help, many of the deadlines come too quickly, and the forms and processes to apply are too complicated and may be inaccessible.<sup>21</sup> Victims who do not speak English as a first language have a harder time accessing services, and when they do, those services are seldom culturally sensitive or appropriate, contributing to a lack of awareness about available help.<sup>22</sup>

### Discriminatory roadblocks to help and limited legal protections

Exclusions and barriers that disproportionately impact communities of color prevent violent crime victims from getting help. Depending on the state and the type of crime, a survivor can be excluded from aid and protections because of issues that have nothing to do with how they became a victim, and represent a barrier to their navigating past the trauma and accessing real healing.<sup>23</sup>

Some states may provide victims compensation only for certain crimes, or may provide protection only for people victimized by certain acts. A victim of police violence, even when the law enforcement official has been prosecuted for the crime, can be denied compensation. In Michigan, victims can receive compensation only for crimes that result in a

physical injury, which excludes survivors who were held up at gunpoint, survivors of stalking, some survivors of sexual harm, and other violent crimes that did not result in physical injury.


Some states may exclude family members of a victim from getting help or protection. While entire families are impacted when one person in the household is a victim of traumatic violence—everyone may need to heal, and everyone may need some help to transition—law can exclude family members from being eligible for help.

**Services are not universally available, and eligibility restrictions have been reported to result in disproportionate denials of compensation or services to victims of color.**

More than 70 million people have an old criminal record. While that record may be a decade or more old, some state laws exclude people with old records or their families from getting help. Old records mean millions of people are less safe: One survey showed fifty-nine percent of people with old criminal records who later became victims of crime were unable to obtain help.<sup>24</sup>

Laws and practices may deny compensation and protection to someone perceived to have played some role in their victimization (for example, if someone was under the influence when victimized).<sup>25</sup> Ohio, for example, will deny compensation to victims who possessed drugs—on their person or in their bloodstream—at the time of the crime, even if there is no relationship between the drug possession and why the person was victimized.

Some legal protections may cover some victims of crime, but do not cover all victims of all crimes. In Florida, for example, someone who is a domestic violence victim can take leave from a job to access services and receive unemployment benefits to recover lost wages if they have to leave their job for safety reasons, but these protections do not extend to victims of other violent crimes.



**Where there is aid for someone to pay for a funeral, childcare, transportation, or some other type of help someone might need to heal, the benefit levels are too low.**

### **Benefits are too low and do not cover actual costs**


Where there is aid for someone to pay for a funeral, childcare, transportation, or some other type of help someone might need to heal, the benefit levels are often far too low to enable victims and victims' families to utilize the aid effectively. In some cases, benefit levels were set a long time ago, and thus do not cover today's costs. In Michigan, for example, victims compensation will pay only about half of what it costs to pay for a burial.<sup>26</sup>

The aid available usually also does not cover the breadth of what someone needs to recover, or the benefits may be insufficient to cover the costs of immediate medical care, dental care, legal support in the aftermath of a crime, therapy, treatment, adult dependent care, and transportation.

### **Community providers lack capacity and resources**

When victims do receive help, they are more likely to receive it from a family and friends, a hospital, and community-based programs than from the police or a district attorney.<sup>27</sup> Addressing the needs of underserved crime victims will mean resourcing community-serving providers that are in the same neighborhoods as most victims are, and have cultural competencies to work in these neighborhoods.<sup>28</sup> However, these types of community-based service providers face structural barriers to delivering much needed help at the scale needed.

Many, if not most, service providers operate on a fee-for-service model. This means the organization provides services and then bills the government, receiving reimbursement long after the fact. If demand increases suddenly—as it has during the current pandemic—the organization may not have the funds to address community needs. Providers can have difficulty managing cash flow under a fee-for-service or cost reimbursement system that requires them to provide the up-front services without the resources to pay for them.



Community-serving victims services programs struggle to stay open and meet the needs for services, especially in times of crisis.

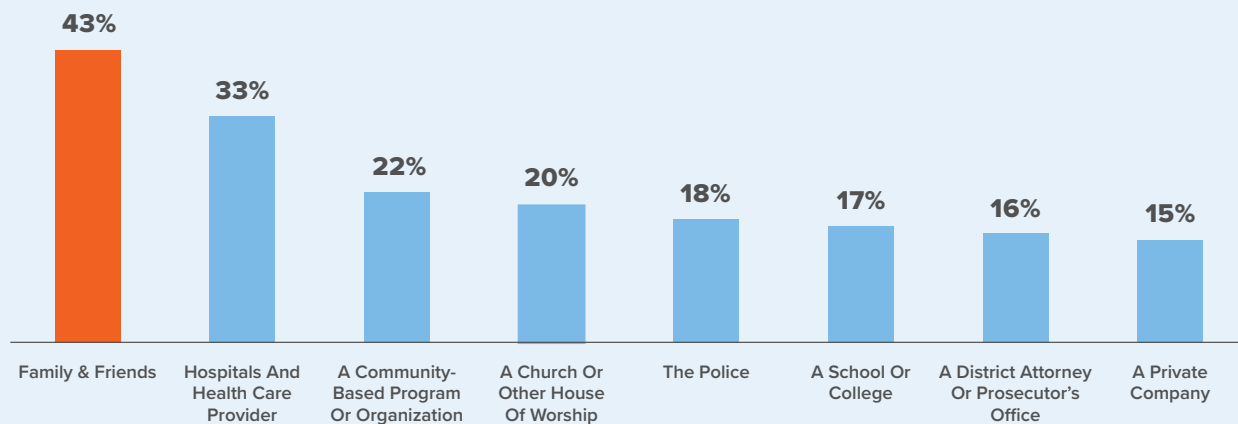
Community-based victims service providers also can face limits because government grant funds are restricted, instead of providing flexible funding. If funding is restricted, it means the money may only be spent on a specific task (e.g. to purchase a certain type of treatment or service). If a program is funded only through categorical, restricted sources, it may mean it cannot purchase the diverse types of services crime survivors need, when they need them. Flexible funding would allow a provider to purchase exactly the right service at the time it is needed.

It can also be challenging for community-based service providers to build the infrastructure and capacity necessary to access available funding or to meet the data recording and reporting requirements of federal and state grants.

The pandemic has increased these challenges. Some state governments continue to face budget constraints that may put pressure on their ability to fund community-victims service programs at a time demand is on the rise.

## Most crime victims do not receive support from the criminal justice system.

If you received any of the previous services, from which of the following did you receive that help or support? Please choose all that apply.



Alliance for Safety and Justice. (2020, September). *Toward shared safety: The first-ever national survey of America's safety gaps*. Retrieved from: [www.wesharesafety.us](http://www.wesharesafety.us)



## ELIZABETH AND CARLOS CALIFORNIA

### **We needed counseling and therapy, but we had no advocate telling us how to get help**

When our son Juan Carlos was murdered, a police officer didn't call us. A detective didn't call us. We received a call from a friend of his saying that he had been shot and we needed to go to the hospital. Later, when the police did come to us, it was to ask questions about my son: who he was, did he have any enemies. We felt like they thought it was our fault this happened.

We had many challenges after the crime. But there was no advocate telling us how to navigate the process to get help. We never got a phone call from anyone in the justice system letting us know there were services like mental health support, compensation for lost wages or time off from work.

My brother and sister learned about victim compensation from the funeral home. Because my family was resourceful, we were able to receive some funds for the costs -- but it was not nearly enough.

Carlos lost his job during this time—he was told he was not performing up to standards. Because there was no support for him, we struggled to pay the bills based on my job as a nurse. By the grace of god, I have no idea how we did not lose our home. And as Carlos struggled with work and depression, I struggled with health problems of my own.

I also needed counseling and therapy. But I had trouble finding the right person who understood I was navigating trauma. The first thing the therapist from my employer said to me was, "Wow, you look great considering what you've been through." She referred me to someone else. But I never heard back from them.

Today, Carlos and I work with other victims to make sure that what happened to us does not happen to them. We help them through the steps that we had trouble navigating ourselves.

When someone goes through this kind of trauma it doesn't matter how resourceful they are. It doesn't matter what they've known. You need someone to guide you. Literally, to help you fill out forms. Drive you to an office. Many need access to a trauma recovery center, where people can help them work through the system to obtain what they need to heal. We also need more community-based programs to help victims where they live.

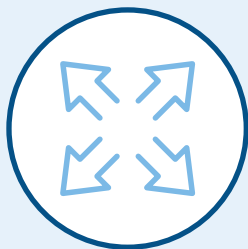
If victims have a seat at the table to shape policy, we will ensure everyone can get the resources, support and healing they need to recover.



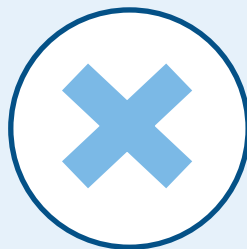
# NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS AGENDA

Over the past decade, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice has successfully advocated for reforms that prioritize trauma recovery and community healing, and address the needs of underserved crime victims. Embedded in these reforms are key principles that should drive any elected official or decision-maker to align laws, budgets, and practices so that more crime survivors can get the help they need to be made whole again.

## The National Crime Victims Agenda is a plan to



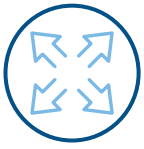
**EXPAND  
VICTIMS' RIGHTS**



**END  
DISCRIMINATION**



**ENSURE MORE URGENT HELP,  
LESS RED TAPE**



# EXPAND VICTIMS' RIGHTS

## 1 Increase legal protections for victims to prevent job and housing loss while victims are recovering from a crime

In each state, some legal protections exist to prevent victims from losing housing or employment while recovering from traumatic stress, but these protections must be strengthened.

Policymakers should:

- ✓ *Extend employment leave protections to all victims.* Business leaders and policymakers should work together to ensure all victims who need time to recover after a crime should have access to unpaid leave.
- ✓ *Expand victims' rights to safe housing.* Victims' rights to maintain housing after becoming a victim of crime must be guaranteed also, including permission to delay housing or rental payments if a financial crisis emerges after victimization, and also authority to immediately change locks for protection.

### EXTENDING EMPLOYMENT PROTECTIONS IN CALIFORNIA.

In 2020, through AB 2992, survivors extended unpaid employment leave protections to all survivors of violence and their immediate family members, ensuring that survivors have a reasonable amount of time following a violent crime to recover from the incident, without risking job loss.

### EXPANDING HOUSING PROTECTIONS IN CALIFORNIA.

In 2020, through SB 1190, survivors helped ensure that victims, family, and household members of violent crimes can terminate a lease without penalty within 180 days following a crime.



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## 2 Expand victims' civil legal services to help victims stabilize

The legal system is very difficult to navigate, and a host of legal issues can arise in the aftermath of crime. Civil legal services programs reduce the burden on victims and help victims stabilize their lives in times of crisis. These vital services provide support for everything from housing and employment matters to restraining orders, and medical, immigration or family law assistance. However, too few victims are aware of, or are able to access, these vital legal services.

Policymakers should:

- ✓ Ensure the establishment of victims' legal services that can reach all victims in need of legal assistance.
- ✓ *Engage in widespread public education* to ensure victims are aware of—and can access—these services in their communities and in culturally and linguistically appropriate settings.

### 3 Ensure dignity, respect, and support for the victims of unsolved crimes

The majority of crime goes unsolved. Too often, the only survivors who attain information or help from the justice system are those for whom an arrest or prosecution is underway or has occurred. Victims and surviving family members of unsolved crimes can suffer extreme stress and chronic trauma, arising in part from not having information or knowing what happened. However, these survivors have rights too. Real justice should ensure dignity and support for all victims of crime. Justice system officials must ensure responsiveness to these survivors, treat these victims with respect, and ensure they are connected to the recovery services and support they need.



## LISA, ILLINOIS

### **My family was disqualified from receiving the financial and counseling assistance we needed**

I lost my youngest son, Darren, when he was 25 in a suburb south of Chicago. His children, aged three and four, lost their father.

The headline in the local paper the next day after his passing read, “Man shot to death in Park Forest had drug, weapon convictions.”

A few days after that, when I was communicating with the police about whether crime victim compensation was an option—at that point I was looking for help to cover funeral expenses—the officer on the case told me, “Considering the circumstances, I don’t think you should even consider applying.”

My son was ineligible for victim compensation because he was on parole and because his death occurred during a drug transaction. And when I looked deeper into the criteria, I realized that not only did that affect me in meeting the cost of his final expenses, but it also affected his children. Under other circumstances, they would have been eligible for some sort of financial support as well as counseling services. But because he was ineligible, his immediate family was disqualified from receiving the financial and counseling assistance we needed.

The unfairness of that is so extremely large—this wasn’t a situation we asked to be part of. And we are living with the consequences.

Seeing my son’s humanity diminished because of his life choices moved me to create the Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices, a behavioral health services organization named in his memory that supports all those impacted by the trauma of gun violence in building life beyond the harm.

One of my favorite quotes that relates to how individuals are treated by the system and in society is, “None of us is the sum total of the worst thing we have ever done or experienced.” If the system and our society would grasp that, the world would change. We need to change the laws that prevented my family from receiving the counseling and financial support they needed to recover from the crime, and to ensure that what happened to my family does not happen to others.





## END DISCRIMINATION

### 4 Expand victim services eligibility to all victims of crime and violence

Bureaucratic processes and unfair eligibility regulations currently exclude too many people harmed by violent crime from accessing victim services in their time of need. While important benefits and protections for victims do exist in many states, such as victim compensation, those benefits and protections are not readily available to all crime survivors. Expanding eligibility to services and compensation to all victims is crucial to support healing and stop trauma cycles. Policymakers must end discriminatory rules or practices that treat victims differently depending on their status or demographics.

Policymakers should:

- ✔ *Provide coverage to survivors of all crimes.* Eligibility for support should be based on the survivor's injury as a result of a crime, not on a penal code list of crimes. Someone who is a victim of crime established to have been caused by law enforcement must be eligible for help.
- ✔ *Expand coverage to witnesses to crime and close family members.* In many states, the definition of "secondary victim" is narrowly defined to include a parent or spouse. This should be expanded to reflect the true constellation of victims' loved ones (uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins), and members of nontraditional family structures. Family members who are witnesses to trauma should also be eligible for help and support for healing.
- ✔ *Allow multiple types of documents to be used to establish eligibility for help.* Eligibility should not require police reports when other types of documentation are available and verifiable.
- ✔ *Disentangle aid and protection from police investigation needs.* Since more than half of victims do not report the crime to the police, the current law excludes millions of people from getting help if aid is contingent on working with the police. Law enforcement and the justice system should have the tools to solve crimes, but that shouldn't influence whether a survivor should get help.
- ✔ *End eligibility exclusions that effectively blame victims for their own victimization.* Laws that allow someone to be denied aid and protection because people that were under duress or the influence of substances when victimized need to be changed.
- ✔ *Support survivors who have past convictions.* No one should be excluded from receiving victim support simply because of their record or status on supervision. These policies reduce access for people at greater risk of violent crime and in most need of healing and help.



### REDUCING EXCLUSIONS FOR HELP IN TEXAS.

Working with the Attorney General's Office, crime survivors in Texas brought light to the practices that can exclude victims from receiving aid, and increased information around denials of aid so that applicants can have a longer period to provide missing information.



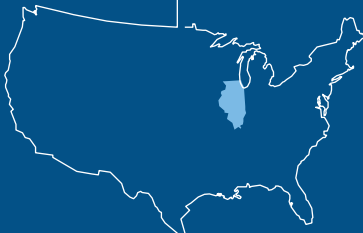
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## 5 Ensure equal access to compensation and service

While people from all walks of life are impacted by crime and violence, its impact is also concentrated and unequal. Services are not universally available, and eligibility restrictions result in disproportionate denials of compensation or services to victims of color. Victims of color also report experiencing significant difficulty actually obtaining access to recovery services, irrespective of whether a benefits application was approved or not.

Policymakers should:

- ✓ *Track and publish data by race and other key demographics.* Entities responsible for delivering victims aid need to publish data on denial or approval rates by key demographics for compensation applications and victim access to services. This information should be used to immediately address disparities in application approvals or access to services to ensure equal access to help for all. As part of this process, policymakers could conduct an annual study to identify and close service gaps. This can be a tool to assess victims' needs, identify service gaps, and prioritize investments to meet the needs of those most harmed and least helped.
- ✓ *Establish survivor advisory councils to review data and set policy.* These councils would help keep victim support programs accountable with an eye to reducing barriers to accessing resources and disparities in access. The council should comprise a meaningful number of survivor members, including individuals who would qualify as underserved. Survivors and others who are mental health professionals, representatives of community-serving organizations, and advocates of alternatives to incarceration should also be represented.



### **MORE EQUAL ACCESS TO COMPENSATION AND SERVICES IN ILLINOIS.**

In 2021, through HB 3653, victims reduced the number of exclusions to compensation for family members of crime survivors.



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## KIMESHA, TEXAS

**I received no support or counseling from the criminal justice system**

When I was five years old, my stepfather's brother—my favorite uncle—began to molest me. I received no support or counseling in the aftermath, and a cycle of trauma and violence began.

When I was 14, my boyfriend put a gun to my head, strangled me and kidnapped me. In my adult years, my boyfriend beat me. Still I received no support or counseling from the criminal justice system, the police or my community. Nobody asked me, "Are you okay?" I turned to self-medication and heavy drinking, but I was still unable to numb the pain.

As an adult, I finally gained access to a shelter that helped me get away from an abuser. But I had to have a job to qualify, and there was only one hour of counseling each week. There was no time to process what had happened. No time for healing.

When you think about 15 to 20 women who have been abused for years in this one setting, this just contributes to more trauma. Nobody is really getting the in-depth support that gets to the root of the issue.

What's needed is real help—mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, and trauma recovery centers—to get people to safety and change the dynamic of hopelessness that so many survivors feel. This kind of help also decreases future crime by giving people with unaddressed mental health challenges an alternative to self-medication.

I don't feel that the criminal justice system is working. As a crime survivor, I had to find my own space for healing and discover the path to inner strength, mental health and self-worth. But nobody should have to walk that path alone.



## ENSURE MORE URGENT HELP, LESS RED TAPE

### 6 Reach more survivors in crisis—and faster

The majority of crime survivors have never heard of victim's compensation or other benefit programs designed to help survivors stabilize their lives. Overly bureaucratic processes and protocols can mean that people don't get the help they need when they need it. Outreach should thus include extensive efforts to ensure that all victims are aware of, and have access to, victim support benefits and civil legal protections.

Policymakers should ensure that:

- ✔ *Information reaches the places where crime survivors access help.* Outreach should thus include extensive efforts to ensure that all victims are aware of, and have access to, victim support benefits and civil legal protections. Information needs to focus on the points of contact most likely to reach crime victims: hospitals, libraries, community centers, places of worship and faith, counseling clinics, childcare centers, physicians' offices, and funeral homes. Community-based providers in communities of color, and that can reach young and low-income individuals, should be integrated into outreach efforts.
- ✔ *Information on benefits and programs must be accessible.* Information on the type of help available and how to access it must be available in multiple languages, and accessible across public awareness tools, such as posters, brochures, websites, and online resources, including the applications forms themselves.
- ✔ *Stakeholders must fully understand the benefits process.* Everyone who works on a daily basis with victims of crime, including law enforcement, service providers, and health professionals, should be trained to understand how to access help, the civil legal protections that exist, and how to ensure victims can access help.
- ✔ *Ensure immediate financial needs are met quickly.* Even once aware of the available benefits, many survivors still report being unable to access them because the response time for meeting their urgent needs is too slow. Financial support for covering urgent needs should be distributed within a very short window of the request, ideally no more than two days.
- ✔ *Make certain that non-emergency claims are resolved within a reasonable amount of time.* Victims support claims should not take months, even years to process, past the point when the aid could have made a critical difference in addressing a victim's hardship.



### FASTER PROCESSING TIMES IN ILLINOIS.

In 2021, through HB 3653, crime survivors changed the victims compensation system to include faster processing time of applications for awards.

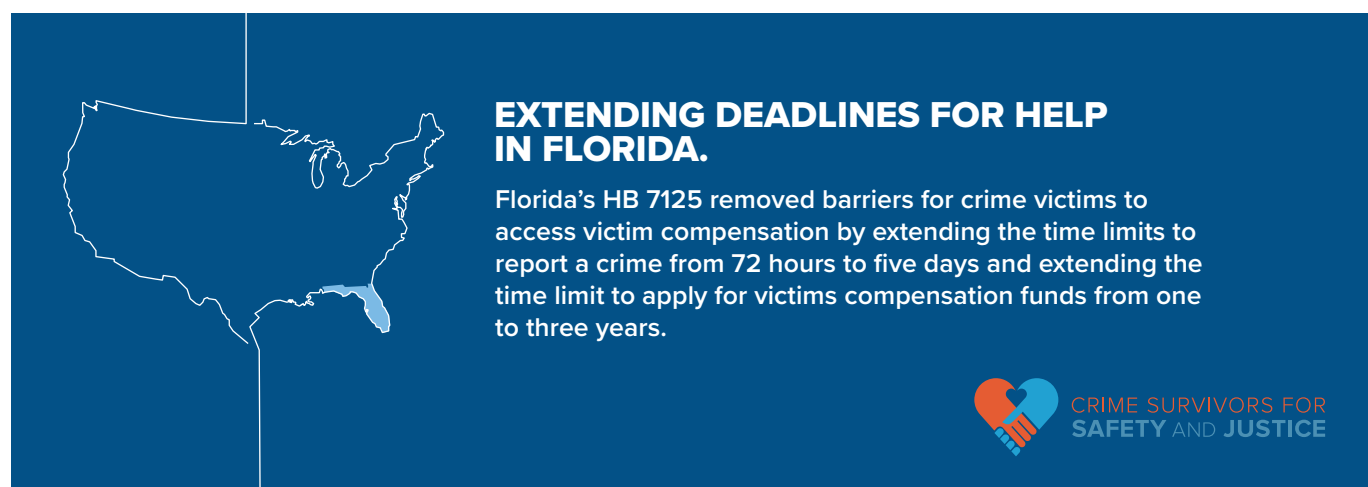


## 7 Cover actual costs of recovery and extend deadlines for help

Aid designated for victims to help with recovery and/or bereavement should be meaningful enough to cover the actual costs that victims incur. Recognizing that navigating trauma is difficult and can take years, especially if a person is harmed as a child or youth, policymakers need to extend the deadlines to apply for aid to ensure more victims can access help and to account for the process of trauma.


Policymakers should:

- ✓ *Increase benefits to match victims' actual costs.* Benefits must also rise annually to reflect the current cost of living and what someone would need to grieve and to secure safe housing, treatment, and healing services in 2021—not the 1980s or whenever the benefit schedules were originally set.
- ✓ *Cover more healing, treatment, and support.* If other public benefits are not available (or there is a gap in someone accessing them after a crime), aid must address a broad spectrum of the needs any victim might require to heal. These needs could include medical and dental care, mental health care, lost earnings, full coverage of relocation expenses, bereavement leave, travel, replacement of a victim's property, and the attorney fees needed to navigate the process of obtaining aid.
- ✓ *Fully cover burial expenses and funerals, and expand outreach for this benefit.* No survivor should have to face challenges commemorating the passing of a loved one simply because the costs of a burial and funeral are too high. Lawmakers should increase the benefit to cover these, and couple it with outreach so that burial and funeral aid is connected to other types of support.
- ✓ *Extend deadlines to apply for help.* To acknowledge that navigating trauma is difficult and can take years, policymakers need to extend the deadlines to apply for aid to ensure more victims can access help and to account for the process of trauma. Ohio, Vermont, and Utah do not have time limits to submit applications for victims' compensation, while, because of crime survivor advocacy, Illinois and California recently extended the timelines to accept applications. Unreasonable time limits to submit an application following a crime or to report the crime to law enforcement in order to qualify for aid should be eliminated.



**EXTENDING DEADLINES FOR HELP IN FLORIDA.**

Florida's HB 7125 removed barriers for crime victims to access victim compensation by extending the time limits to report a crime from 72 hours to five days and extending the time limit to apply for victims compensation funds from one to three years.

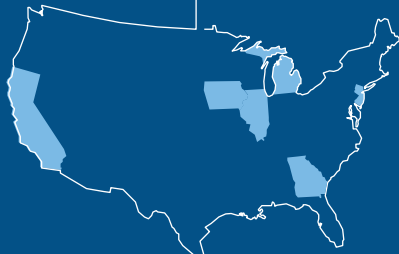
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## 8 Ensure trauma recovery services are available

The vast majority of survivors of violence, especially repeat violence, experience one or more symptoms of trauma. Unaddressed trauma can cause a lifetime of debilitating outcomes for people's physical health, mental health, and economic stability. The solutions do exist—but they are not supported at scale to reach and support the number of people in need. Model trauma recovery programs that provide wraparound case management and mental health support as well as peer-to-peer support can help survivors heal.

Policymakers should:

- ✔ *Expand access to trauma recovery.* More trauma-informed service providers, such as Trauma Recovery Centers (TRCs), are needed to support crime victims who might otherwise fall through the cracks. While studies show that TRCs are effective at addressing the needs of underserved crime survivors, there are only 34 centers across six states. TRCs and other similar trauma recovery providers need more funding to reach more survivors.<sup>29</sup>
- ✔ *Expand trauma support at schools.* Places that have nearly daily contact with young people, like schools, are an ideal touch-point for youth traumatized by violence. Policymakers should increase support for proven, trauma-informed interventions led by school-based mental health clinicians—particularly in schools where high rates of students have been exposed to violence. Models for such programs for children include counseling to deal with negative thoughts and anxiety, and training to build resilience and coping skills.
- ✔ *Eliminate barriers relating to who can deliver trauma recovery services.* Some states place restrictions on the type of providers that can receive funding to provide help to victims. Broadening the eligible pool of providers that underserved crime victims are more comfortable with and inclined to turn to would eliminate one of the key barriers to their accessing funding. Policymakers should review the rules on what types of organizations are eligible to provide trauma recovery services.
- ✔ *An opportunity to recover from trauma should be a fundamental goal of our public safety systems.* There is now some data and a growing sense among policymakers that the justice system—in itself—is not meeting the needs of the vast majority of survivors. As a right, crime survivors should be able to address all the issues that impact them because of victimization, including access to culturally competent mental health care, safe housing, accommodation at work while in recovery, reasonable accommodation and support at school for children exposed to violence, and credit repair and debt forgiveness from issues related to victimization. These types of support should be available to victims as a right.



### VICTIMS EXPANDED THE NUMBER OF TRAUMA RECOVERY CENTERS.

Starting with one site in California, crime survivors helped establish, fund and expand 34 Trauma Recovery Centers in six states — California, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan and New Jersey.



## 9 Invest in community-based victim services providers

People turn to family, friends, trusted local leaders, and community-based local support services in times of crisis. That's where the vast majority of survivors of violence and crime go to for help. Yet, community programs often struggle to stay open and meet the needs for services, especially in times of crisis.<sup>30</sup> Culturally competent community-based programs rooted in neighborhoods that experience concentrated violence and crime need to be supported with multi-year flexible funding and sufficient resources to meet their needs, and should be scaled up across the country.

To shift more funding to community-based victims services providers, policymakers should:

- ✔ *Designate a percentage of funding.* The federal government requires ten percent of a certain grant fund—Victims of Crime Act assistance grants—to go to underserved survivors,<sup>31</sup> but this is not enough money to meet the scale of the need. Policymakers need to set a goal of reserving a meaningful percentage of funds for providers focused on underserved crime survivors, such as victims of gun and community violence, as well as a broader range of victims who are harmed, including family members affected by a loved one's homicide or assault.
- ✔ *Develop specialized Requests-for-Proposal (RFPs).* Every year, government entities issue requests for proposals—formal documents requesting bids from nonprofit organizations applying for funding to deliver help to crime survivors. Policymakers should release more targeted RFPs for providers that work exclusively with underserved crime victims, such as young people of color and people impacted by certain types of crime who live in certain hard-hit communities. Cultural competency among these populations and communities should be an essential requirement and a measure for awarding grants in these focus areas. Specialized RFPs can also help prepare incarcerated crime survivors for reentry into society, building on opportunities that opened up when the grant rules were changed in 2016 allowing federal dollars to be used for people sentenced to prison.
- ✔ *Make it the victims services agencies' job to fund community-based providers.* When an administrator directs a department to address the needs of underserved crime survivors, it is more likely to happen. Policymakers should make an affirmative effort to reach new providers and populations by dedicating time and resources to funding community-based organizations. Administrators should work with community partners to broaden their reach, so that the list of organizations that receive notices about grant opportunities could be expanded and updated.
- ✔ *Make equity a "must" in victims services funding decisions.* Decision-makers should explicitly designate equity as a key criteria in grading and selecting applicants and as a signal to applicants that equity—in the applicants' mission, service delivery, and in the composition of their board and staff—are necessary components for winning a grant.



### REDIRECTING RESOURCES TO COMMUNITY-BASED VICTIMS SERVING PROVIDERS.

#### FIRST TIME AWARDS TO COMMUNITY SERVING PROVIDERS IN FIVE STATES AND WASHINGTON DC.

Working with state administrators of victims services funds, crime survivors redirected tens of millions of dollars to fifteen community-based organizations in California, Illinois, New Jersey, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Washington D.C. — to groups that had never before received funding to address the needs of underserved crime victims.



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- ✔ *Put crime survivors on bodies that award funding to set policy and drive decisions.* Crime survivors, with their unique experience and expertise, must be involved at every stage of the process that provides resources to fund help for victims. Survivors must set and drive the application process to ensure that funds are used to address the needs of underserved communities.
- ✔ *Ensure crime survivors are leading community-based providers.* Given the notorious complexity of obtaining aid, community-based providers need the leadership and experience of crime survivors with direct hands-on experience of navigating these resources themselves, and who live and work in the same communities as the victims they serve. Policymakers should add criteria to awards processes to favor organizations that are led and staffed by crime survivors.
- ✔ *Incentivize collaboration and partnership.* Larger victim services agencies should be incentivized to partner with community-based providers. By leveraging the combined assets of larger service providers and smaller grassroots organizations, both become capable of expanding and deepening their services to underserved victims.
- ✔ *Encourage resource sharing.* Policymakers should reward organizations that show they are trying to be cost-effective by sharing resources: Organizations can share administrative overhead costs or a marketing campaign with another like-minded organization. In this way, the smart use of soft contributions, not just hard dollars, can help increase collaboration between traditional providers and those more focused on underserved communities.
- ✔ *Revamp the reimbursement process for community-based providers.* Smaller programs in particular struggle to secure reimbursement for their services under the current system, which can involve some extremely complicated billing processes and rules that effectively bar community-based providers from being able to operate. Federal and state reimbursement procedures should be scrutinized to see how they can be made more accessible to community-based providers.
- ✔ *Streamline the application process.* Application timelines should be long enough to account for new applicants and for organizations to do the groundwork necessary to successfully apply for and win a grant. Policymakers should streamline and simplify the application, create opportunities for questions and answers during the application process, and conduct “how to apply” and other capacity-building training in underserved communities in advance of when proposals are due.



**INVESTING IN COMMUNITY BASED PROVIDERS IN OHIO.**

Victims have worked with the Attorney General to change processes so that more community-based victims service providers could be funded.



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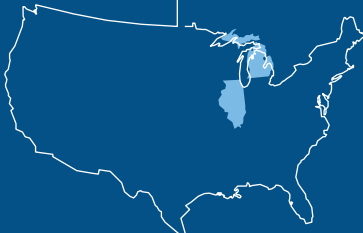


## 10 Fund urgent crisis needs—now

In the context of the current global pandemic, many millions of people are in acute crisis and less support is available.<sup>32</sup> Homicide and violence rates have increased—a predictable outcome of large-scale occurrences of job loss, school closures, food and housing insecurity, and loss of life arising from COVID-19. At the same time, frontline crisis-assistance service providers have either been forced to close or are operating with limited capacity.<sup>33</sup>

Policymakers should:

- ✔ Provide substantially increased investments to frontline service providers to help quell the violence and get survivors the crisis-assistance support they need.
- ✔ Increase the allocation of state general fund dollars to victims compensation programs and other state grant programs to meet the true community victimization needs.
- ✔ Increase flexible, general support dollars to community-based crisis-assistance providers that can help provide survivors and communities with immediate cash assistance to meet their basic needs.
- ✔ Review the law, policy, and practice to increase the ability to leverage federal grants to ensure funding is available to community-based organizations providing critical services.
- ✔ Provide flexible and up-front cash assistance for victims of violence and families of homicide victims without requiring victims make the expenditure first and then seek reimbursement. This would allow for immediate needs to be met to reduce collateral stress.



### FUNDING MORE URGENT CRISIS NEEDS IN ILLINOIS AND MICHIGAN.

In 2020, survivors in Illinois won a commitment to reallocate \$20 million from the first federal stimulus designated for the justice system to community service providers.

As part of the first federal stimulus package in 2020, victims in Michigan won an additional \$4 million for essential services that went to support domestic violence survivors.



# CONCLUSION

Crime is a traumatic experience for most crime victims, and yet few are effectively supported by the criminal justice system. A growing body of research has demonstrated that untreated trauma, especially among those who experience repeat victimization, can contribute to substance abuse, mental health issues, housing instability, or other problems that increase the risk of being a victim again in the future. The National Victims Agenda is an important step forward in understanding how to address the needs of those who are the most harmed and least helped, and to provide survivors what they need to recover from the crimes committed against them. We urge policymakers to review laws, budgets, and practices to ensure that victims can access the services they need to heal, and to properly fund victims' support services and programs to address the needs of survivors at scale to the extent they exist.



## **REALLOCATING RESOURCES TO TRAUMA RECOVERY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN CALIFORNIA.**

By the end of 2021, Proposition 47 will have reallocated over \$400 million dollars from reduced prison and jail populations to local public-safety programs, trauma recovery services for crime survivors, and programs for vulnerable youth.



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# ADVANCING CHANGES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF UNDERSERVED CRIME VICTIMS

Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice are working with policymakers to change laws, budgets, and practices to increase the chances that a crime survivor will get the healing and support they need.

## Changes to laws

- **Illinois's HB 3653 (2021):** Changed the victims compensation system to include a faster processing time of applications for awards (to 28 business days), extended overall time limits to file victims compensation applications from 2 years to 5 years, and reduced exclusions to aid for victim family members of crime survivors. The legislation also increased victim compensation levels for funeral expenses.
- **California's AB 2992 and SB 1190 (2020):** AB 2992 extended unpaid employment leave protections to all survivors of violence and their immediate family members, ensuring that survivors have a reasonable amount of time following a violent crime to recover from the incident, without risking job loss. SB 1190 ensures that victims, family, and household members of violent crimes can terminate a lease without penalty within 180 days following a crime.
- **Florida's HB 7125 (2019):** Removed barriers for crime victims to access victim compensation by extending the time limits to report a crime from 72 hours to five days and extending the time limit to apply for victims compensation funds from one to three years.
- **California's SB 375 (2019):** Extended the time to file for victim compensation from three years to seven years.
- **Illinois's SB 1607 (2019):** Expanded the ways a person under 18 years of age could be considered to have cooperated with law enforcement for the purposes of qualifying for crime victims' compensation.

## Changes to budgets

- **\$400 million reallocated through California's Proposition 47.** By the end of 2021, Proposition 47 will have reallocated over \$400 million dollars from reduced prison and jail populations to local public-safety programs, trauma recovery services for crime survivors, and programs for vulnerable youth.
- **\$20 million in federal funds directed to community-serving providers for urgent crisis needs.** In 2020, survivors won a commitment to reallocate \$20 million from federal justice funds to community service providers.
- **\$4 million allocated to trauma recovery services in Michigan.** In 2020, survivors won a commitment from lawmakers to allocate \$4 million to establish and fund Trauma Recovery Centers.
- **\$4 million in federal funds for urgent crisis needs in Michigan.** As part of the first federal stimulus package in 2020, victims in won an additional \$4 million for essential services that went to support domestic violence providers.

## Changes to practices

- **National expansion of Trauma Recovery Centers across six states.** Starting with one site in California, crime survivors helped establish, fund and expand 34 Trauma Recovery Centers in six states. *In Ohio alone, survivors worked with the Attorney General's office to establish and fund eight Trauma Recovery Centers.*
- **First time awards to community-serving providers in five states and Washington, D.C.** Working with state administrators of victims services funds, tens of millions of dollars were directed to community-based organizations in California, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.—to groups that had never before received funding to address the needs of underserved crime victims.
- **Reducing exclusions for help in Texas.** Working with the Attorney General's Office, crime survivors in Texas brought light to the practices that can exclude victims from receiving aid, and increased information around denials of aid so that applicants can have a longer period to provide missing information.

## KEY REPORTS



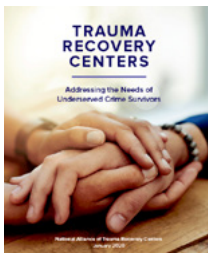
### [Towards Shared Safety: The First-Ever National Survey of America's Safety Gaps.](#)

Victims want government spending to be reallocated from the justice system to Shared Safety solutions, and investments in programs that address the needs of the most harmed and the least helped.



### [Stop the Spread: A Survey of Crisis Assistance Service Providers and People on the Frontlines Working to Stop Cycles of Crime.](#)

Community-based providers report an increasing need for services and a diminished ability to provide them, with four in five organizations reporting a change in service requests, and the vast majority of respondents reporting a severe drop in funding.



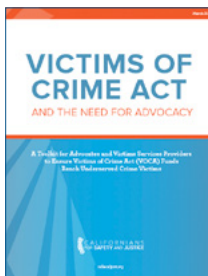
### [Trauma Recovery Centers: Addressing the Needs of Underserved Crime Survivors.](#)

The Trauma Recovery Center (TRC) model was developed to address the needs of underserved crime survivors and has been replicated from one site in California to 34 in six states.



### [Crime Survivors Speak: The First-Ever National Survey of Victims' Views on Safety and Justice.](#)

The National Survey of Victims' Views is first-of-its-kind research on crime survivors' experiences with the criminal justice system and their preferences for safety and justice policy.



[The Victims of Crime Act and the Need for Advocacy.](#) The Victims of Crime Act and the Need for Advocacy offers an overview of a key federal funding stream and recommends ways to bring funding to under-resourced community-serving providers.

## ENDNOTES

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