



# 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**



# NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS AGENDA

## A plan to address the needs of our nation's diverse victims of crime.

Despite substantial increases in criminal justice expenditures over the last three decades, the majority of crime survivors do not receive support to recover from harm. In 2018, more than 3 million Americans were the victim of at least one violent crime. While nearly eight out of ten survivors say their life had been affected by the crime, fewer than 1 in 3 receive the kind of help they would need to recover from the crime.

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.

The National Victims Agenda is a plan to:

**EXPAND VICTIMS RIGHTS' + END DISCRIMINATION + ENSURE MORE URGENT HELP, LESS RED TAPE**

## EXPAND VICTIMS' RIGHTS

### INCREASE LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR VICTIMS TO PREVENT JOB AND HOUSING LOSS WHILE VICTIMS ARE RECOVERING FROM A CRIME

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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.

### EXPAND VICTIMS' CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES TO HELP VICTIMS STABILIZE

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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.

### ENSURE DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND SUPPORT FOR THE VICTIMS OF UNSOLVED CRIMES

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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 responsiveness to these survivors, treat these victims with respect, and ensure they are connected to the appropriate recovery services and support.

## END DISCRIMINATION

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### **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.

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### **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

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

## INVEST IN COMMUNITY-BASED VICTIM SERVICES PROVIDERS

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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.

## FUND URGENT CRISIS NEEDS—NOW

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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.

### About Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice

Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice is a national network of 46,000 crime survivors joining together to create healing communities and shape public safety policy. We are a flagship project of Alliance for Safety and Justice.



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