Sentencing, Corrections and Public Safety
Guiding Principles for Crime Victims and Survivors in America

Crime victims and survivors have an integral role in America’s criminal justice system and efforts to promote individual and public safety. The overall effectiveness of the criminal justice system relies significantly on victims’ willingness and ability to participate in justice processes.

Through national criminal justice and public safety reform efforts, victims, survivors and those who serve them have contributed to the following seven “guiding principles” for sentencing, corrections and public safety.

1. An ultimate goal of public safety policy is to reduce crime, resulting in fewer people and communities who are harmed.

2. Crime victims and survivors have a significant role in shaping criminal justice policy as individuals who know first-hand the real costs of crime.

3. Crime victims and survivors deserve to be treated with dignity and validated as persons who have been harmed by crime, with their autonomy and privacy respected at all times.

4. Mandatory supervision of offenders who pose a serious risk to public safety upon their return to the community is essential throughout the offender reentry process in order to promote victim and survivor safety.

5. While it is important for offenders to receive just punishment, the quantity of time that convicted offenders serve under any form of correctional supervision must be balanced with the quality of evidence-based assessment, treatment, programming and supervision they receive that can change their criminal behavior and thinking and reduce the likelihood that they will commit future crimes. For many offenses and offenders, shorter prison terms are acceptable if the resulting cost savings are reinvested in evidence-based programs that reduce recidivism.

6. Offenders should pay all court-ordered legal and financial obligations, such as victim restitution and child support. Offender compliance with restitution and support orders is a key measure of offender accountability and the performance of offender supervision agencies.

7. Victims’ rights to justice must be enforced in accordance with the law and adequately funded. Survivors and victims have a right to safety, representation and participation in the legal process. They deserve information and notification about the status of their case and the alleged or convicted offender, access to victim assistance services, as well as restitution in all cases with pecuniary losses, and victim compensation following violent crimes.

These principles offer a foundation for the fair treatment of crime victims and survivors, and for the use of evidence-based practices that hold offenders accountable for their crimes and reduce recidivism.
National and State Signatories to Guiding Principles  
(As of 7/29/11)

**National**
Anne Seymour  
National Crime Victim Advocate  
Washington, DC

Ada Pecos Melton, President  
American Indian Development Associates  
Albuquerque, NM

Cindy Brignon, Co-Chair  
American Probation and Parole Association Victim Issues Committee  
Lexington, KY

Dan Eddy, Executive Director  
National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards  
Alexandria, VA

Dan L. Peterson, Ph.D.  
Professor and Associate Dean  
Washburn University Joint Center on Violence and Victim Studies  
Topeka, Ks

Dean Kilpatrick, Ph.D., Director  
National Crime Victim Research and Treatment Center  
Medical University of South Carolina  
Charleston, SC

Delilah Rumberg, CEO  
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape/National Sexual Violence Resource Center  
Enola, PA

Gordon Bazemore, Ph.D.  
Professor and Director  
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Florida Atlantic University  
Boca Raton, FL

Helga Luest, President and CEO  
Witness Justice  
Rockville, MD

Herman Millholland, Consultant and National Victim Advocate  
Millholland and Associates  
Los Angeles, CA

Janice Harris Lord  
National Crime Victim Advocate and Member, Texas Board of Criminal Justice  
Arlington, TX

John H. Stein, Executive Secretary  
International Organization for Victim Assistance  
Newberg, OR

Laurie Dishman, Senior Vice President  
International Cruise Victims  
Sacramento, CA

Mai Fernandez, Executive Director  
National Center for Victims of Crime  
Newberg, OR

Margaret Mata, Executive Director  
SAFE NOW Project  
Chillicothe, MO

Marlene A. Young, Ph.D., J.D.  
Vice President and Immediate Past President  
International Organization for Victim Assistance  
Newberg, OR

Marti Anderson  
National Crime Victim Advocate  
Des Moines, IA

National Association of Victim Service Professionals in Corrections  
Board of Directors

Pat Tuthill  
President and Founder  
Peyton Tuthill Foundation  
Tallahassee, FL

Patricia Byron, President Emeritus  
Mary Byron Project  
Louisville, KY

Renny Cushing, Executive Director  
Murder Victims’ Families for Human Rights  
Cambridge, MA

Sandra Pavelka, Ph. D., Director  
Institute of Youth and Justice Studies  
Florida Gulf Coast University  
Fort Myers, FL

Steve Derene, Executive Director  
National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators  
Madison, WI

William Kellibrew, President  
The William Kellibrew Foundation  
Washington, DC

State  
**ARIZONA**
Carl Fox  
(Retired) Arizona Department of Corrections  
Glendale, AZ

**CALIFORNIA**
Cindy Marie Absey  
Victim/Witness Director  
San Luis Obispo County Victim/Witness Assistance Center  
Office of the District Attorney  
San Luis Obispo, CA

Jill Weston, Victim Services Specialist  
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation  
Office of Victim and Survivor Rights and Services  
Sacramento, CA

Kevin Lowe, Ph.D.  
Criminal Justice and Victim Services Consultant  
(Retired), California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation  
Ione, CA

Pamela Kalllsen, Executive Director  
Marjaree Mason Center  
Fresno, CA
COLORADO
Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Hilary Lancaster, Victim Assistance Coordinator Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Denver Denver, CO
Nancy Lewis, Executive Director Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance Denver, CO
Rob Sprecher, Practice Director Broomfield, CO

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Jennie Yoon, Intern National Center for Victims of Crime Washington, DC
Melissa Hook, Director Office of Victim Services Executive Office of the Mayor Washington, DC

GEORGIA
Georgia Network to End Sexual Violence

HAWAII
Dennis Dunn, Director Victim/Witness Kokua Services Department of the Prosecuting Attorney City/County of Honolulu, HI
Pamela Ferguson-Brey, Executive Director Crime Victim Compensation Commission Honolulu, HI

ILLINOIS
Jennifer Bishop Jenkins, Director Crime Victims United of Illinois Chicago, IL

INDIANA
Brent Myers, Director Registration and Victim Services Indiana Department of Corrections Indianapolis, IN
Hon. Gregory Donat Superior Court Judge Tippecanoe County Lafayette, IN
Ramona Jarboe, Victim Services Coordinator Allen County Adult Probation Fort Wayne, IN

IOWA
Jean M. Kuehl Assistant Director, 6th Judicial District Department of Correctional Services Cedar Rapids, IA
Linda Sorenson, Victim Services Coordinator 6th Judicial District Department of Correctional Services Cedar Rapids, IA
Lisa Heldenbrand, MSW, LMSW, Counselor/Advocate Polk County Crisis & Advocacy Services Des Moines, IA

KANSAS
Jennie Marsh, LMSW, Director Office of Victim Services Kansas Department of Corrections Topeka, KS

KENTUCKY
Sharon Currens, Executive Director Kentucky Domestic Violence Association Frankfort, KY
Travis A. Fritsch Domestic Violence Specialist Louisville, KY

LOUISIANA
Jean S. Wall, Director Crime Victims Services Bureau Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections Baton Rouge, LA

MARYLAND
Courtney Fisher, Esq., Adjunct Faculty University of Maryland Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice College Park, MD
Roberta Roper, Founder/Board Chair Maryland Crime Victims’ Resource Center, Inc. Upper Marlboro, MD
Russell Butler, Executive Director Maryland Crime Victims’ Resource Center Upper Marlboro, MD

MASSACHUSETTS
Erin Gaffney, Director Victim Services Massachusetts Department of Corrections
Karen McLaughlin, Advisor Harvard University Program on Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery Cambridge, MA
Paula McCarran, General Analyst U.S. Postal Inspection Service Boston, MA

NEW HAMPSHIRE
Bette Jane Riordan, Coordinator New Hampshire Victim Assistance Commission New Hampshire Department of Justice Concord, NH
Jay M. Zax, Victim Advocate Hillsborough County Attorney’s Office Nashua, NH
Peter A. Michaud, Victim Services Coordinator New Hampshire Department of Corrections Concord, NH
Sandra Matheson, Director New Hampshire Attorney General Office of Victim/Witness Assistance Concord, NH
NEW MEXICO
Robin Brassie, VOCA Grant Administrator
New Mexico Crime Victims Reparation Commission
Albuquerque, NM

NEW YORK
Janice Grieshaber Geddes, Executive Director (Retired)
The Jenna Foundation
Syracuse, NY
Karen Ziegler, Director
Crime Victims and Sexual Violence Center
Albany, NY
Lisa Smith, Director
Sexual Assault and Crime Victim Assistance Program for Rensselaer County at Samaritan Hospital
Troy, NY
Lorraine Beer, Child Crime Victim Advocate
Saratoga Center for the Family
Saratoga Springs, NY

NORTH CAROLINA
Aurelia Sands Belle, Executive Director
Durham Crisis Center
Durham, NC

OHIO
David L. Voth, Executive Director
Crime Victim Services
Lima, OH

OREGON
Bob Robison, Victim Services Manager (retired)
Multnomah County Department of Community Justice
Portland, OR

PENNSYLVANIA
Carol L. Lavery, Victim Advocate
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of the Victim Advocate
Harrisburg, PA

VERMONT
Amy Holloway, Director Victim Services
Vermont Department of Corrections
Waterbury, VT

WASHINGTON
Jenny Wieland Ward, Executive Director
Families and Friends of Missing Persons and Violent Crime Victims
Everett, WA

WISCONSIN
Colleen Jo Winston, Director
Office of Victim Services and Programs
Wisconsin Department of Corrections
Madison, WI

**NEW MEXICO**
Reverend Robert Denton, Ph.D., L.I.S.W.
Executive Director
Summit County Victim Assistance Program
Akron, OH

**NEW YORK**
Barbara Murray, Ph.D.
Director, Victim Services Unit
Iowa Tribes of Oklahoma
Perkins, OK

**OKLAHOMA**
Marcia Smith
Executive Director
Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Oklahoma City, OK

**OREGON**
Bob Robison, Victim Services Manager (retired)
Multnomah County Department of Community Justice
Portland, OR

**PENNSYLVANIA**
Carol L. Lavery, Victim Advocate
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of the Victim Advocate
Harrisburg, PA

**VERMONT**
Amy Holloway, Director Victim Services
Vermont Department of Corrections
Waterbury, VT

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Wisconsin Department of Corrections
Madison, WI

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New Mexico Crime Victims Reparation Commission
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The Jenna Foundation
Syracuse, NY
Karen Ziegler, Director
Crime Victims and Sexual Violence Center
Albany, NY
Lisa Smith, Director
Sexual Assault and Crime Victim Assistance Program for Rensselaer County at Samaritan Hospital
Troy, NY
Lorraine Beer, Child Crime Victim Advocate
Saratoga Center for the Family
Saratoga Springs, NY

**NORTH CAROLINA**
Aurelia Sands Belle, Executive Director
Durham Crisis Center
Durham, NC

**OHIO**
David L. Voth, Executive Director
Crime Victim Services
Lima, OH

**OREGON**
Bob Robison, Victim Services Manager (retired)
Multnomah County Department of Community Justice
Portland, OR

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Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Office of the Victim Advocate
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Office of Victim Services and Programs
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Multnomah County Department of Community Justice
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Colleen Jo Winston, Director
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Wisconsin Department of Corrections
Madison, WI