



Enhancing Victims' Rights After Conviction

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According to the [Bureau of Justice statistics](#), in 2017, 3.1 million people over age 12 reported being victims of violent crime during the prior six months. The National Center for Victims of Crime reports that [44% of women and 23% of men](#) will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. These numbers do not include other forms of victimization, such as property damage or identity theft. Crime victimization is more common than one might imagine.

More than three decades ago, West Virginia enacted the [Victim Protection Act of 1984](#). In it, the legislature declared that the legal system would crumble without the cooperation of victims, and yet victims were often treated as mere tools to

identify and punish offenders. Without access to information or even notifications of release, the legislature found, victims' needs were grossly ignored by the legal system. West Virginia's statute encapsulates the confusion and powerlessness crime victims faced before the passage of victims' rights statutes.

Today, [every state](#) has a set of statutes intended to empower victims in the judicial process. [Most states](#) have even amended their constitutions to include a victims' bill of rights to ensure lasting protection for victims of crime.

■ **Post-Conviction.** If a victim reports a crime, the crime is investigated, an arrest is made and the suspect is convicted, what happens next? Does the crime victim have the right to know if the convicted perpetrator is released or paroled?

Did You Know?

- In 1980, [Wisconsin](#) became the first state to pass a victims' bill of rights.
- In 1982, President Ronald Reagan's [Task Force on Victims of Crime](#) released a report, which recommended the U.S. Constitution be amended to incorporate victims' rights, but there has been [no such amendment](#) as to date.
- In 1985, the United Nations adopted the [Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power](#), which describes best practices for treating crime victims at an international level.

