Considerations For Trauma-Informed and Victim Centered Correspondence





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Direct Service Providers

- Rapidly changing dynamics of victims' services
- Understanding of trauma
- Trauma-informed practices
- Humanization of people impacted by crime (humanization of victims)
- Dr. Rose mentioned in her Message from the Director that it is a priority to "increase access to compensation for victims of crime who have been historically underserved and adversely affected by inequality."
- The OVC VOCA Center's leadership has made an impact with this Learning Community
- Will hear from your colleagues on their work and commitment to improving the process, increasing access, and keeping up with the changing dynamics.



"What you write is as important as what you say"

National Center for Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health, 2014





The Scope of the Impact of Crime or Victimization

Types of victimization

- Physical
- Psychological
- > Financial
- Social
- Spiritual

- > MVI, DV, IPV, SA, Assault
- Bullying, Hate Crime, Elder Abuse,
- Homicide, Family Violence

Seeking a mental health provider can help survivors improve their mental health, and medical doctors can help treat physical injury. But due to barriers like fear of not being believed, internalized blame, high cost of services, and lack of transportation, survivors of sexual violence often do not report their experiences or seek formal healthcare.



Source: Society of Behavioral Medicine 2022

First Person Account

Well, on the night of August 4, 2019, I was out enjoying the night with my father, Derrick Fudge, at a popular nightclub district in downtown Dayton, Ohio, called the Oregon District. A young male came down the side of the building firing a AR-15 weapon, killing my father beside me and eight other innocent lives. I was performing CPR, trying to save my dad's life; the shooter was still on the street, shooting, until the police took him down. I still cannot believe that I did not die that night, but instead my father died for me, shielding the bullets that could have been for me.

Source: The Fudge Foundation website





Needs and Wants of Crime Victims/Survivors (Each of these experiences is tied to trauma)

Validation

Recognition

Compensation

Access to Justice

*Keep these in mind when developing written correspondence

Source: UNODC handbook 2019



OVC defines a victimcentric approach as having a systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim to ensure the compassionate delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner.



Six Principles

1. Safety

6. Cultural,

Historical, and

Gender Issues

2. Trustworthiness and Transparency

Four Key Elements

- 1. Realizes the impact of trauma
- 2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma
- 3. Responds by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices
 - 4. Resists re-traumatization
- 5. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
- 4. Collaboration & Mutuality

3. Peer Support



What is the goal of the communication



To make a determination on the eligibility of the claim for benefits



How do we do this to communicate that their experience and victimization still matter



As an institution, you are in a position of power -- cultural considerations are important



Collaborate and support healing



Communicate

 Safety, respect, and that the person is believed, and their experience matters even if a claim does not fall within guidelines for compensation.

The language we choose can easily imply judgment.



Goals for Written Correspondence (How)

Readability - 54% below 6th grade, according to the National Literacy Institute

Clear and Concise Writing

Plain language and accessibility - define terms/glossary

How does it look on the page - colors, bolding, paragraphs

Guide the reader - you are receiving this letter because...

Inclusive language

Person-Centered

Use of Command Language

Trauma-Informed Principles



Person-Centered Language

Focusing on the person as the whole human being first, not their condition, disability, diagnosis, or a characteristic of their personal identity.

- People impacted by crime
- > Person who was attacked



"Being a person impacted by violent crime"

VS.

"A victim or survivor of violent crime"

Hyams, K, Prater, N., Rohovit, J., Meyer-Kalos, P.S. (2018). Person-centered language. Clinical Tip No. 8 (April 2018): Center for Practice Transformation, University of Minnesota.



Be Person-Centered

Phrasing keeps the person at the center of communication.

What happened to them is an event, <u>not</u> a reflection of who they are.

A feeling of shame often accompanies victimization, so acknowledging someone as a person, not just a victim, can promote safety.

Written Communication Tips



Be short, clear, and concise



Consider the structural elements of written correspondence - streamlined and organized letters or instruction sheets can be helpful



Bold important dates. Empowering use of command language



Avoid legal/technical terms when possible - consider a glossary of terms and a warm-up letter



Persons impacted by crime may be anxious or overwhelmed when filling out applications. They may experience distressing emotions re-visiting often traumatic and life-changing events.



Command Language

Be aware of COMMAND LANGUAGE and how information is communicated; sometimes, a simple adjustment changes the entire message.

FAILURE vs. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT...



Importance of Intro and Outro



The intro and outro phrasing of written communication can be very effective in validating the experience of a person impacted by crime.



For example, "the claim," not "your claim," does not fall within the guidelines for compensation...



Intro for Written Correspondence

Sample intro:

"Being a person impacted by crime can cause overwhelming feelings or reactions. Please take your time and read the documents below carefully and thoroughly, as they contain important information regarding the claim for compensation."



To Close Correspondence or Outro

Sample outro:

- Idea outro: "The ... Program continually strives to assist crime victims with financial hardships suffered as a direct result of the crime. However, the final disposition of a claim is governed by the laws of the State ... After careful review of all submitted documentation, the program regrets to inform you that the claim is ineligible for payment (does not meet guidelines). Please find the specific details of the determination... statute below (add statutory reference).
- Although it may be difficult to understand the limitations of a compensation program, please be advised that the outcome of the application does not diminish the significance of your experience as a person impacted by crime. You may want to visit our website at ... for additional information."



Closing the Correspondence

Sign

All correspondence from a specific contact

Include

Include all contact information

- website address
- phone extension

Improve

Accessibility



Language To Use

Person impacted by a crime, victim, survivor

Use both or ask how the person would like to be identified

Confirm that we have received the documents

The claim

Language to Avoid

- Investigate your claim: instead, try... review, and explore the information relating to
- Deny- instead try determination... ineligible based on...
- Closure
- Consider explaining why terms like alleged are used in docs.
- Command language that promotes fear.





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Warm-up letter Smart Phrases Instruction Sheet Glossary of Terms

Tips to help work with barriers with changing and updating letters



Maxine Bergstein Senior Investigator/Advocate

Victim Compensation & Assistance Division

Office of Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell





Trauma Informed Correspondence

Maxine Bergstein, Krystal Rohloff, & Morgan St. James

Victim Compensation & Assistance Division March 2023



Take Aways From Learning Community

Command Language: "You must" "We need"

Person First Language: People are "people who have been impacted by crime," they are not only survivors/victims of crime

Accessibility: Average reading level is an 8th grade level

Avoid giving too much information all at once!



Goal/Mission

Use commonly known language rather than legal language

Person impacted by crime rather than survivor/victim/ claimant/etc.

Split up/add/take away information

Benefit:
Eliminate calls to program clarifying letters received



Action Plan & Initiative

Step 1: Initial Letters

- Initial Letter
- Glossary of Terms
- Debt Protection Collection Letter
- Claim Review Process

Step 2: Being Reviewed

- Review Letter
- Pending Eligibility
- Expense Checklist

Step 3: Eligible or Ineligible

- Eligible:
 - Qualify Letter
 - Qualify
 Checklist
- Ineligible
 - Letter from JM

Step 4: Process Expenses

- Expense Approved
 - NOA
- Expense Denial
 - Letter from JM



Updated Initial Letter

Before

We recognize that this can be a very difficult time for you. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact the Division of Victim Assistance and Compensation. Otherwise, we will contact you as soon as a decision has been made about your eligibility.

After

Being a person impacted by crime can cause overwhelming feelings or reactions. Please know it is the goal of the program to support persons impacted by crime whenever possible. You may want to visit https://www.mass.gov/infodetails/statewide-resources for more information on resources. We can be reached by phone or email to discuss details of the program and to answer any questions you may have.



Updated PSCR Letter

Before

Please be advised that this Office is **investigating** a claim for compensation filed pursuant to M.G.L. c. 258C, the Victims of Violent Crime Act.

After

Please be advised that this Office is **reviewing** a claim for the named person above for compensation filed pursuant to filed pursuant to M.G.L. c. 258C, the Victims of Violent Crime Act.



Updated SA PSCR Letter

Before

Please contact the hospital department with any further questions about this procedure.

After

Should you receive a bill for the sexual assault exam, please contact the Victim Compensation & Assistance Division. You are not responsible to pay expenses that were from the exam, and it is against the law for the hospital to bill you.



Updated Homicide Initial Letter

Before

Our first steps involve obtaining police reports of the incident and making a determination about eligibility for compensation. If we conclude that you are eligible, we may request further information in order to determine the exact amount of your reimbursable crime-related expenses. In general, the victim compensation process takes about six months to complete.

After

We are attaching a few helpful documents for your reference that can provide some basic information about our program and what the process looks like. Please take your time and read the documents carefully and thoroughly, as they contain important information regarding the claim for compensation.

- 1) Glossary of Frequently Used Terms
- 2) Victim Compensation Fact Sheet
- 3) Claim Review Process



Updated Debt Collection Letter

Before

Once the Program determines that an expense is ineligible or that the claim has been denied, usually taking anywhere between 4 to 6 months, you may then choose to follow your normal bill collections procedures.

After

Once the Program determines that an expense is ineligible or that the claim has not met the guidelines of the Program, usually taking anywhere between 6 to 8 months, you may then choose to follow your normal bill collections procedures.



NEW Glossary of Terms

The Program created a new Glossary of Terms included with the initial letter to the applicant.

Glossary of Frequently Used Terms

Victim

 Legally, the term victim refers to the person named as a victim on an official reporting agency's document.

Claimant

This is the term used to refer to the person who is applying for compensation. This is a
general term that can refer to a survivor, a parent of a minor child, or a surviving
family/friend of an individual who is now deceased.

Compensation

Compensation is defined as the reimbursement of funds to the claimant or provider(s) who
have expenses as a result of the crime.

Eligible

 If a claim is made eligible, that means that all of the required criteria that is defined in the legal guidelines have been met. If a claim is made eligible, the claimant is eligible to receive funds from victim compensation.

Compensable

 Types of expenses that we are allowed to assist with based on our program's statutes and guidelines.

Fund of Last Resort

 State regulations prevent us from compensating financially until all other sources of funding are used up. This includes but is not limited to settlement funds, restitution, and insurance payouts or coverage.

Award

The amount of money being paid to a claimant and/or provider at a given time.

• Debt Collection Protection Letter

This document represents a part of MA law that states that while a claimant is working
with our office, their medical expenses cannot be sent to collections. Please provide a copy
of this document to providers to whom you might owe a balance to.

Notice of Award and Assent (NOA)

The Notice of Award is the paperwork that is sent to notify that a reimbursement and/or
payment to a provider is to be submitted for the claim. The Notice of Assent is the
document that requires a signature to approve that you give consent for this specific
payment to be made.



NEW Glossary of Terms in Homicide Cases

Glossary of Frequently Used Terms

• Victim

 Legally, the term victim refers to the person named as a victim on an official reporting agency's document.

Claimant

This is the term used to refer to the person who is applying for compensation. This is a
general term that can refer to a survivor, a parent of a minor child, or a surviving
family/friend of an individual who is now deceased.

Compensation

Compensation is defined as the reimbursement of funds to the claimant or provider(s) who
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 Types of expenses that we are allowed to assist with based on our program's statutes and guidelines.

Fund of Last Resort

 State regulations prevent us from compensating financially until all other sources of funding are used up. This includes but is not limited to settlement funds, restitution, and insurance payouts or coverage.

Award

The amount of money being paid to a claimant and/or provider at a given time.

Ancillary Expenses

 The term ancillary refers to supplementary expenses that often accompany a funeral or burial. This can include headstones, urns, flowers, burial clothing for the deceased, transportation of the deceased for burial, and transportation for a family member to accompany the deceased for burial out of state or out of the country.

Notice of Award and Assent (NOA)

The Notice of Award is the paperwork that is sent to notify that a reimbursement and/or
payment to a provider is to be submitted for the claim. The Notice of Assent is the
document that requires a signature to approve that you give consent for this specific
payment to be made.

The Program created a different Glossary of Terms for the initial letter to applicants in homicide cases that includes information about ancillary expenses instead of the debt collection information.



NEW Claim Process Review

With every initial letter, the applicant also receives helpful information about how the claim is reviewed and processed.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE CLAIM HAS BEEN SUBMITTED?

1. Application received

- Within 72 business hours, we will notify you with confirmation that the claim has been received by email or mail
- A claim number will be assigned which is your individual case number

2. Initial request of documents

- Relevant reports are requested; including but not limited to police reports, 209A/258E restraining/harassment prevention order documents, motor vehicle crash reports, and Department of Children and Families reports
- We will notify you if additional documents or information are needed

3. Claim pending review

 Due to the large number of claims, there is a waiting period of about 6-8 months until your claim can process to the eligibility review process.

4. Eligibility review process

- We will notify you by mail/email when the eligibility review process has begun.
- Claim is reviewed to determine if all criteria is met
- This criteria comes from the program guidelines
- This process may include reaching out to relevant detectives, advocates, agencies, and organizations to gather further information regarding the claim
- Unfortunately, we cannot provide a specific time frame in which this process is completed. We work to complete the review process as quickly as possible.

Decision on eligibility

- o If eligible:
 - The claim is assigned to an Investigator/Advocate (case manager) who will be the point
 person for the claim. They will notify you by email or mail that your claim is eligible,
 they will provide you with their specific contact information, and work with you to
 process crime-related expenses
- If ineligible:
 - The claim is denied based on not meeting one or more of the program guidelines. We will
 notify you by email or mail. You will also receive information on your right to appeal the
 decision, and the two appeal options.



NEW Homicide Claim Process Review

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE CLAIM HAS BEEN SUBMITTED?

1. Application received

- Within 72 business hours, we will notify you with confirmation that the claim has been received by email or mail
- A claim number will be assigned which is your individual case number

2. Initial request of documents

- Relevant reports are requested; including but not limited to police reports, criminal complaints, or information from the Medical Examiner's Office
- We will notify you if additional documents or information are needed

3. Funeral/Burial & Ancillary/Headstone Expenses Verification Process

- We will notify you by mail/email when we receive a report that satisfies program guidelines allowing us to consider these expenses.
- This process may include reaching out to the funeral home, cemetery, headstone company, or benefit providers (e.g., life insurance or motor vehicle settlement)
- We will notify you by mail/email when we hear back from these providers and will need you to sign and return paperwork to release any payments or reimbursements.
- This process can take 1-4 months depending on how quickly we hear back from providers. We work to complete the review process as quickly as possible.

Eligibility review process: Eligibility for additional expenses

- Claim is reviewed by an Eligibility Coordinator to determine if all criteria is met
 - This criteria comes from the program guidelines
- This process may include reaching out to relevant detectives, advocates, agencies, and organizations to gather further information regarding the claim
- Unfortunately, we cannot provide a specific time frame in which this process is completed. We work to complete the review process as quickly as possible.

Decision on eligibility

- o If eligible:
 - The claim is assigned to an Investigator/Advocate (case manager) who will be the point
 person for the claim. They will notify you by email or mail that your claim is eligible,
 they will provide you with their specific contact information, and work with you to
 process any other crime-related expenses.
- If incligible:
 - The claim is denied based on not meeting one or more of the program guidelines. We will
 notify you by email or mail. You will also receive information on your right to appeal the
 decision, and the two appeal options.

A similar letter is sent to applicants in homicide cases with added information regarding the Program's request for the medical examiner's report.



Updated Homicide Preliminary Eligibility Letter

Before

We are writing to inform you that your Victim Compensation claim has been made eligible for costs

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT:

Program then lists what it can pay for both Funeral/Burial and Ancillary/Headstone Expenses

After

We are writing to inform you that the Victim Compensation claim has been made eligible for costs

Being a person impacted by crime can cause overwhelming feelings or reactions. Please read through this letter carefully and slowly as this correspondence contains important information regarding your claim.

Program then lists what it can pay for.



NEW Eligibility Review Letter

This letter is sent when a claim is picked-up for review by an Eligibility Coordinator

Dear John,

You are receiving this letter because you have filed a claim with the Massachusetts Victim Compensation Program. Being a person impacted by crime can cause overwhelming feelings or reactions. Please read through this letter carefully and slowly as this correspondence contains important information regarding your claim.

We are writing to inform you that the claim is currently undergoing the Eligibility Review Process. My name is Viola Kaci, and I am the Eligibility Coordinator assigned to review the claim submitted. I am happy to answer any questions regarding this process. Please call me on my direct line at 617-963-2913 or email me at Viola Kaci@Mass.Gov.

I will thoroughly review and process the claim as quickly as possible. This process may involve reaching out to relevant detectives, advocates, agencies, and organizations to gather further information regarding the claim. The Victim Compensation Program strives to assist persons impacted by crime with financial hardships suffered as a direct result of the crime. The eligibility of a claim is, however, governed by the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, specifically General Laws c. 258C, the Victims of Violent Crime Compensation Act, and the associated regulations 940 CMR 14.00.

If more information is required, we will reach out to you. Whether your claim is eligible or not, you will hear from us via mail or email once an eligibility determination has been made. In the meantime, with this letter is included a helpful checklist to aide you as you are gathering your crime-related expenses. Please keep this checklist for your records.

We recognize that this may be a very difficult time. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact us by email or telephone. Otherwise, we will contact you once an eligibility determination has been made.

Sincerely,

Viola Kaci Eligibility/Outreach Coordinator



NEW Expense Overview

Victim Compensation Program Overview

- When can I expect to hear a decision on my claim?
 - It is hard to provide an accurate timeline as this step in the process requires the division to obtain information from outside agencies.
- Who/where do I call?
 - Please contact the Eligibility Coordinator assigned to your claim; Viola Kaci at 617-963-2913 or email at Viola Kaci@Mass.Gov
- What should I do in the meantime?
 - Collect crime-related expenses either hold onto them or send them to us to add to the claim
 - Below are the expenses we can assist with if your claim is made eligible.

All submitted expenses must be directly related to the crime listed on your application

MEDICAL EXPENSES (maximum \$25,000)

- ☐ Medical bills, receipts, or canceled checks
- Prescriptions copy of receipts that state the name of drug, doctor, date filled, & price. This can also be done by requesting an "Prescription Statement" from your pharmacy

MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

(maximum \$25,000)

 Counselor's name and address along with any receipts or bills

LOST WAGES (Specifically for the persondirectly impacted by crime) (maximum \$25,000)

- Employer's Name, Address, & Phone Number
- Self-Employed Tax Returns from 1 year preceding the crime and the year in which the crime occurred
- If out longer then the first four weeks, we will need a disability letter from a licensed provider
 - Your assigned Investigator/Advocate will assist with this request if the claim is made eligible

REPLACEMENT BEDDING AND CLOTHING (maximum \$256)

 Items that were seized as evidence by the police/hospital can be considered. Please submit receipts for new items purchased as replacement for items seized

PROFESSIONAL CRIME SCENE CLEARN UP EXPENSES (maximum \$1500)

- □ The crime scene clean-up company has to meet to strict OSHA and Biohazard guidelines
- □ For more information about this, please contact our division

SECURITY MEASURES (maximum \$500)

- Provide receipts for security measure services. These expenses should address safety concerns that the claim has
 - Weapons of any kind are not compensable

MOTOR VEHICLE CLAIMS

- Required to submit insurance information for all parties involved
- □ Status of settlement (if being perused)

Please Note: We are unable to compensate for housing/relocation/rent, pain and suffering, or the replacement or repair of property damaged as a result of the crime or follow up investigation.

A Program Overview One-Pager is sent with the New Eligibility Review Letter



Updated Qualifying Letter

Before

Jane Doe: Applicant: Jane Doe

I am writing to inform you that your Victim Compensation claim has been made eligible. My name is Maxine Bergstein and I am the Investigator/Advocate assigned to verify your crime-related expenses. If you have any questions regarding the process, please call me directly at 617.963.2629 or email me at Maxine.Bergstein@Mass.Gov. If it is determined that you have incurred compensable out-of-pocket losses not covered by any other sources, you may be reimbursed by the Victim Compensation fund.

The following expenses may be compensable:

- medical services, medical supplies & prescriptions
- dental services
- lost wages (victim only)
- counseling for victims, non-offending parents of child victims, and for children who witness biolence against a family member
- professional crime scene cleanup up to \$1500
- replacement bedding/clothing up to \$250 if seized as evidence
- security measures up to \$500

After

Dear John Doe:

You are receiving this letter because you filed a claim for Victim Compensation with the Massachusetts Attorney Generals' Office. Please read through carefully and slowly. Being a person that's been impacted by a crime can potentially cause distressing reactions, and the letter contains important information.

My name is Maxine Bergstein, and I am your Investigator/Advocate assigned to assist your crimerelated expenses and answer questions regarding the process, please call on my direct line at 617-963-2629 or email me at Mass.Gov.

If you have crime-related expenses that you are or were responsible for paying out of pocket, please know the following are compensable expenses:

- Medical services, medical supplies, & prescriptions (maximum \$25,000)
- Dental services (maximum \$25,000)
- Lost Wages (specific for the person directly impacted by the crime maximum \$25,000)
- Counseling can be provided to the following persons: victim, non-offending parents, and minor witnesses (maximum \$25,000)
- Professional Crime Scene Clean Up (maximum \$1500)
- Replacement bedding/clothing that was SEIZED as evidence (maximum \$250)
- Security Measures (maximum \$500)



Updated Qualifying Letter (Cont.)

Before

IF NO HEALTH INSURANCE, YOU MUST COMPLETE A FREE CARE/MASS HEALTH APPLICATION WHERE YOU RECEIVED TREATMENT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE FOLLOWING TREATMENT. FAILURE TO DO SO MAY RESULT IN A DENIAL OF COMPENSATION OF YOUR HOSPITAL EXPENSES.

After

With this letter is a detailed explanation of the information you may need to submit for me to process crimerelated expenses. If you have submitted copies of your crime-related expenses, I will begin working on them as soon as possible. The checklist should assist you in sending in your crime-related expenses and explain what you may need to submit in to gain access to the Victim Compensation funds.



Updated Homicide Qualifying Letter

Before

Please note: the Victim Compensation statute and regulations were updated for crimes occurring on or after July 1, 2013. As a result, the following expenses may be compensable for survivors of homicide victims up to a maximum allowable amount of \$25,000 per crime.

I am writing to inform you that your Victim Compensation claim has been made eligible. My name is Maxine Bergstein and I am the Investigator/Advocate assigned to verify your crime-related expenses involving the loss of your loved one. If you have any questions regarding the

Maxine.Bergstein@Mass.Gov. If it is determined that you have incurred compensable expenses such as funeral/burial services, grief counseling and/or loss of financial support not covered by any

process, please call me on my direct line at 617-963-2629 or email me at

other sources, you may be reimbursed by the Victim Compensation fund.

- funeral and burial expenses up to \$8000
- ancillary burial expenses up to \$800
- professional crime scene cleanup up to \$1500
- security measures up to \$500
- replacement bedding/clothing up to \$250
- grief counseling for family members of homicide victims
- loss of financial support for dependents of homicide victims

** Unfortunately, Victim Compensation cannot compensate for "pain and suffering" or relocation expenses as these are not compensable under the Victim Compensation statute.

After

You are receiving this letter because the claim you filed for Victim Compensation with the Massachusetts Attorney Generals' Office. Please read through carefully and slowly. Being a person that's been impacted by a crime can potentially cause distressing reactions, and the letter contains important information.

My name is Maxine Bergstein, and I am the Investigator/Advocate assigned to verify your crime-related expenses involving the loss of your loved one. If you have any questions regarding the process, please call me on my direct line at 617-963-2629 or email me at Maxine.Bergstein@Mass.Gov.

Please note: the Victim Compensation statute and regulations were updated for crimes occurring on or after July 1, 2013. As a result, the following expenses may be compensable for people who have experienced homicide up to a maximum allowable amount of \$50,000 per crime.:

- Funeral and burial expenses (maximum \$8,000)
- Ancillary burial expenses (maximum \$800)
- Professional crime scene cleanup (maximum \$1,500)
- Security measures (maximum \$500)
- Grief counseling for family members of homicide victims (maximum \$50,000)
- Loss of financial support of dependents of homicide victims (maximum \$50,000)

** Unfortunately, Victim Compensation cannot compensate for "pain and suffering" or relocation expenses as these are not compensable under the Victim Compensation statute. **



Updated Qualifying Checklist

Before

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is your opportunity to submit all relevant information concerning crime-related expenses to date. The decision on an award will be based on our verification of the information submitted with the application, and in response to this request for further information. Therefore, it is very important that you respond to this request as completely as possible. If we do not receive this information from you, we will proceed to issue a Notice of Award or Denial based only on the information we have at that time. It is therefore extremely important that you respond as soon as possible.

If there were no expenses submitted with your application and we do not receive bills/receipts from you in a timely manner, your claim will be placed in an INACTIVE status. Placing your claim in an Inactive status does not affect your eligibility with Victim Compensation; it simply places your claim on hold until expenses are received for compensation. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me at 617-963-2629 or via email at Maxine.Bergstein@Mass.Gov.

After

CHECKLIST FOR CRIME-RELATED EXPENSE

This checklist will hopefully assist you in submitting all your crime-related expenses. If you have previously submitted expenses, we are processing those. If you wish to submit additional expenses, please fill out the checklist below and submit any documents the expense requires.

If there were no expenses submitted with your application and we do not receive bills/receipts from you, the claim will be placed in our filing system while we wait for the expenses to be submitted. If no expenses are submitted, no compensation will be given. Having the claim placed in our filing system does not affect the claim's eligibility with Victim Compensation; it simply places your claim on hold until expenses are received for compensation. There is no time limit to submit expenses. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me at 617-963-2629 or via email at Maxine.Bergstein@Mass.Gov.

The remainder of the checklist contains these expense categories: Medical & Dental, Lost Wages, Mental Health Counseling, Security Measures, and what documents are needed for each.



Updated Qualifying Checklist (Cont.)

Before

The program information sheet has explanations for the following categories:

- Payment Process
- > Health Care Insurance
- Debt Collection Protection
- > Forensic Sexual Assault Exam Expense
- Lost Wages
- Medical & Mental Health Expenses
- Fund of Last Resort

After

The revised program information sheet has explanations for the following categories:

- Payment Process
- Catastrophic Injury
- Frequently Asked Questions by Eligible Claimants

Contact information for the Investigator/Advocate working on the claim is located on the document.



Updated Homicide Qualifying Checklist

Before

The only difference between this checklist and the previously shown checklist, are the expense types. The Homicide Checklist Categories are:

- Funeral/Burial Expenses
- Ancillary Expenses
- Loss of Financial Support For Spouse and/or Child

After

The only difference between this checklist and the previously shown revised checklist, are the expense types. The Homicide Checklist Categories are:

- > Funeral/Burial Expenses
- > Ancillary Expenses
- Loss of Financial Support for Spouse and/or Child
- Grief Counseling Expenses

Contact information for the Investigator/Advocate working on the claim is located on the document.



Updated Homicide Qualifying Checklist (Cont.)

Before

The program information sheet has explanations for the following categories:

- Payment Process
- > Funeral/Burial Expenses
- Ancillary Burial Expenses
- Multiple Claimants Compensation Notice
- No Liability for Expenses of Deceased Adult Victim
- > Fund of Last Resort

After

The revised program information sheet has explanations for the following categories:

- Payment Process
- Multiple Claimants
- No Liability for Expenses of Deceased Victim
- Frequently Asked Questions of Eligible Claimants

Contact information for the Investigator/Advocate working on the claim is located on the document.



Updated Homicide Fact Sheet

Before

The Homicide Fact Sheet Contains the following information and accompanies a requested application:

- Application process (where to submit applications)
- Program contact information
- Funeral, Burial, Headstone, and other Ancillary Expenses
- Information if there are multiple applicants requesting funeral/burial/ancillary expenses

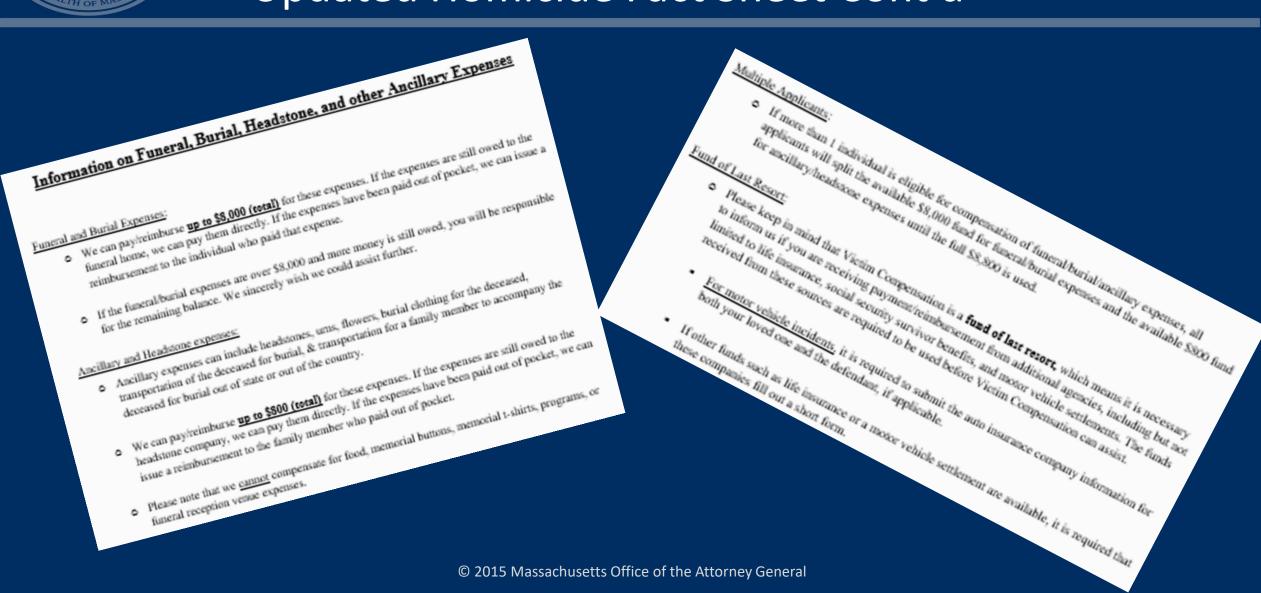
After

The revised Homicide Fact Sheet Contains the following information and accompanies a requested application:

- Application process
- Program contact information
- Where/how to submit the claim
- Who should complete applicant section
- Where to list dependents
- Information if there are multiple applicants requesting funeral/burial/ancillary expenses.



Updated Homicide Fact Sheet Cont'd





Updated Denial Letter

Before

Dear Jane Doe:

This office has investigated your claim for compensation for injuries resulting from a violent crime. Based on our review, we have concluded that you are not eligible to receive crime victim compensation. We have therefore denied your claim as of the date of this letter. The basis of this denial is General Laws c. 258C, the Victims of Violent Crime Compensation Act, which provides that:

Sec. 2(e): An offender or an accomplice of an offender shall not be eligible to receive compensation with respect to a crime committed by an offender. To the extent that the victim's acts or conduct provoked or contributed to the injuries, the division shall reduce or deny an award to the claimant or claimants in accordance with regulations enacted pursuant to section four.

940 CMR 14.07 (1)(a) Definition of Contributory Conduct. Contributory conduct is intentional conduct, willingly and knowingly engaged in by the victim, that is both a direct cause, and a proximate cause, of the victim's injuries.

After

Dear John Doc.

You are receiving this letter because you have filed a claim with the Massachusetts Victim Compensation Program. Being a person impacted by crime can cause overwhelming feelings or reactions. Please read through this letter carefully and slowly as this correspondence contains important information regarding your claim.

The Massachusetts Victim Compensation Program strives to assist persons impacted by crime with financial hardships suffered as a direct result of the crime. The eligibility of a claim is, however, governed by the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, specifically General Laws c. 258C, the Victims of Violent Crime Compensation Act, and the associated regulations 940 CMR 14.00.

After a careful and thorough review of all the submitted documentation, the Program regrets to inform you that the claim is ineligible for payment of Victim Compensation funds. Please be aware we are required to include legal and technical language that meets requirements of state-specific statute guidelines and regulations. Please find the specific details of the eligibility determination below.

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Crime Victim's Reparations (CVR)

Gretchen Mills

Program Administrator

Phrases from the workgroup that are incorporated into my daily vocabulary

"People affected by crime"

"People impacted by crime"

These phrases encompass the terms "victims" and "survivors."



Victim Centered Correspondence Goals

Restructure

Restructure the website to be more user friendly and include information for those going through immediate crisis (911 & 988)

Reduce

Reduce language that may feel personal and could be a trauma reminder for the applicant, such as "investigate" and "your" claim instead of "review" and "the" claim.

Utilize

Utilize techniques such as bullet points to reduce the number of questions regarding steps to appeal or who to contact.



Restructure the CVR website - Action Steps

Engaged Leadership Met with the Director of the Crime Commission to discuss possible changes to the CVR website that would make it more user friendly, and victim focused.

Took a proactive approach with content

Provided information to leadership on content: adding 911 and 988 at top of every page, restructured content, adding brochures, statute, rules and regulations, statewide victim advocate contacts.



Vast Website Improvements

- > 911 and 988 are at the top of each page.
- > Content is structured differently.

e victim Reparations

Call 911 if you are experiencing an emergency.

If you are experiencing a Mental Health Crisis please call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988 or visit https://988lifeline.org/

Do you know a victim of crime? Financial help may be available.

The Nebraska Crime Victim's Reparations (CVR) program assists eligible victims of crime who suffer bodily harm and have incurred a financial loss as a direct result of a criminal act. The Nebraska Crime Victim's Reparations Act was created in 1979 with the passage of Legislative Bill (LB) 910. The CVR program is funded through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), state general fund appropriations, and cash funds.

Types of Expenses	Limitations	Eligibility
 Medical expenses (hospital, doctor, dental, prescriptions, x-rays, etc.) Lost wages while under a doctor's care 	The program does not cover property crime, property loss, property damage or pain and suffering.	Victims – People who are physically or emotionally injured or killed due to a violent crime.
 Funeral expenses (Maximum of \$5,000) Headstone Grave marker may be considered Counseling Therapy (Maximum of \$2,000) Crime-scene clean-up (Maximum of \$1,000) 	Program is the payor of last resort and does not cover expenses paid for by other sources, such as insurance, sick leave, and paid time off, government programs, or the offender via restitution.	A parent or guardian of a minor child who is a victim.
		Dependents who were financially supported by the victim at the time of the homicide.
	The Maximum award is \$25, 000 per incident.	A person who is injured while aiding a crime victim or assisting a police officer.



To apply for compensation please see the "Apply" section on this page.

The new website includes a user-friendly layout, transparency, and well thought out information that will be useful for those impacted by crime, victim advocates, and stakeholders. The Commission Victim Support and Programs Coordinating Team is grouped together for ease of access.

Overview

Commission Victim Support and Programs Coordinating Team, created in April 2023, provides a coordinating team to develop, enhance, manage, and direct the Commission's victims' services programs that cover the core mission functions of support, safety, and prevention. This team functions as a coordinating council, developing strategic plans for the various elements, establishing and monitoring metrics and key performance indicators, engaging in process improvement, and leveraging synergies across their different operational spheres. This focused oversight of victim programs provides subject-matter expertise and focused management needed for the maintenance of service delivery expectations as well as success of special projects.

Programs

Crime Victims' Reparations (CVR)

Nebraska Victim Advocacy Program (NVAP)

Nebraska Victims of Crime Alert Portal (NEVCAP)

Office of Violence Prevention (OVP)



Remove Language That May Cause a Trauma Reminder for Persons Impacted by Crime -Utilize Techniques -

Reduce

Immediate changes were made to the CVR acknowledgement letters, reducing the impact of revictimization by removing language that may cause a trauma reminder for persons impacted by crime.

Utilize

Utilized bullet points and expanding why it is important to stay connected with CVR staff.



Remove Language in Letters That May Cause a Trauma Reminder for Persons Impacted by Crime -

Ideas inspired by the workshop:

- > Take out the word "investigate."
- > Reduce number of times "your" is used in reference to "claim."
- > Add bullet points.
- > Add why it is important to stay in touch.
- > Add additional contact information claimants were contacting the Crime Commission often, not CVR directly.

The Nebraska Crime Victim's Reparations (CVR) Committee has received your claim for compensation. We will investigate and bring the claim for compensation before the Hearing Officer as quickly as possible.

If you have a change of address or phone number, please notify the CVR program.

Please be advised the CVR program is not responsible for any expenses related to your claim. You are responsible for any expenses related to the incident. If your claim is awarded and you have made payments towards these expenses, you may be reimbursed for those payments as out-of-pocket expenses.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (402) 471-2828.



Edits

- > Substituted "carefully consider" for "investigate."
- > Swapped several instances of "your claim" for "the claim."
- > Added why updating program is important.
- > Added bullet points on how to contact the program.
- Added expanded contact information.

The Nebraska Crime Victim's Reparations (CVR) Committee has received your claim for compensation.

We will carefully consider and bring the claim for compensation before the Hearing Officer in order of which it was received.

Please note, updating the CVR program if you move or get a new telephone number is important. The program will communicate with you via US post once the claim is processed.

- If you have a change of address or phone number, please notify the CVR program.
- You can call or text the changes to (402) 471-2828 or send an email to ncc.cvr@nebraska.gov.

Please be advised the CVR program is not responsible for any expenses related to the claim. You are responsible for any expenses related to the incident. If the claim is awarded and you have made payments towards these expenses, you may be reimbursed for those payments as out-of-pocket expenses.

If you have any questions or need to put in a change of address or phone number, please contact me at via phone or text at (402) 471-2828 or you can email me at: gretchen.mills@nebraska.gov.



Clearer Directions for Appeal Added to Decision Letter

Added email, fax number

Please note: if you disagree with the Hearing Officer's decision, you have the right to request a Hearing before the Crime Victim's Reparations Committee. Please follow the steps below.

 Call the CVR Program at 402-471-2828 and speak to or leave a message for the CVR Program regarding your decision for appeal, within seven (7) days of receipt of this letter

and

- Submit a letter, in writing, addressed to the CVR Committee within thirty days (30) after notifying the CVR
 Program of your intent to appeal. Include your reasons for appeal and any information you would like the
 committee to know. You may submit the appeal letter in one of the following ways:
 - Submit the letter, addressed to the CVR Committee, to the following address:
 CVR Committee, PO BOX 94946, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, NE 68509
 - Email the appeal letter to <u>ncc.cvr@nebraska.gov</u>
 - Fax the appeal letter to 402-471-2837



Using my area of influence, I was able to partner with leadership and help create changes to the website and develop written communications that are victim-centered. We will strive for continual improvements based upon feedback from claimants and stakeholders.

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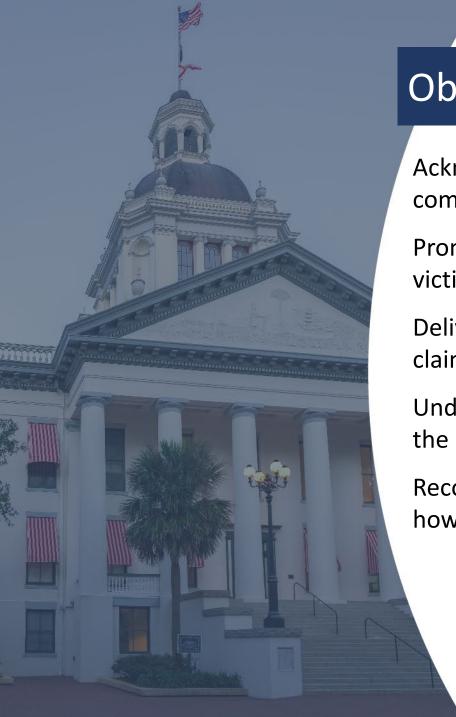


Fostering Revisions to the Five Most Frequently Used Correspondence

Templates

Florida Office of the Attorney General
Division of Victim Services and Criminal Justice Programs
Bureau of Victim Compensation
Michelle Crum, Chief





Objectives for Improving Correspondence

Acknowledge the claimant's right to be informed, and receive financial compensation if qualifications are met.

Promote coordination with victim compensation to improve how crime victims are treated and served.

Deliver information in a non-judgmental manner by putting the needs of the claimant in the forefront of every conversation.

Understand the neurological impact that trauma has which may interfere with the claimant's ability to organize and interpret information.

Recognize that each claimant has unique experiences which may influence how information is perceived.









Objective One: Keep the Claimant Informed

Acknowledge that the claimant has the right to be informed, and receive financial compensation if qualifications are met.

Request for Information

As the assigned Claims Analyst, I have carefully reviewed all submitted documentation. Although we received some of the required documents, we need additional material facts before making a determination in response to the application or expense requested.

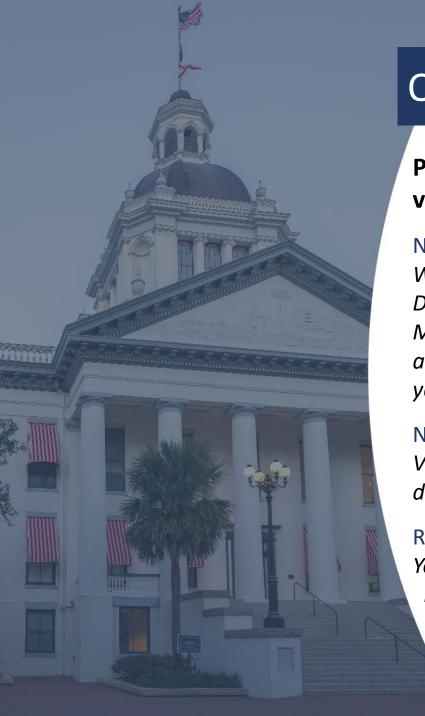
Notice of Payment

It is the goal of the office to ease the financial burdens caused by the crime; however, there are limits to each categorical cap, which are identified on the Schedule of Benefits. Nevertheless, we hope that the payment(s) authorized will support you on your path to recovery and healing.

Special Notice of Insurance Waiver Provision

Property, casualty, or health insurance providers authorized to write policies in Florida cannot bill a victim/applicant whose claim is deemed eligible for any deductibles or copayments. Please submit a copy of this communication to your insurance carrier.





Objective Two: Promote Coordination

Promote coordination with victim compensation to improve how crime victims are treated and served.

Notice of Determination-Ineligible

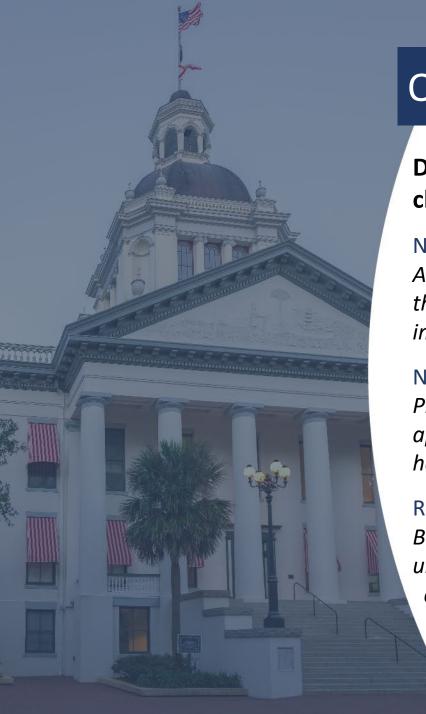
We encourage you to seek other resources, which are listed on the Victim Services
Directory located on the Office of the Attorney General's website at
MyFloridaLegal.com/directory. If you would like a referral to resources that may be
available to assist you, please consider seeking services offered by victim advocates at
your local law enforcement agency, state attorney's office, or victim services center.

Notice of Determination-Eligible

Victim advocates throughout the state have been trained on the qualifications and documentation requirements needed to support benefit determinations.

Request for Information

You are receiving this letter because you filed an application for compensation benefits with the Bureau of Victim Compensation.



Objective Three: Victim Centric Delivery

Deliver information in a non-judgmental manner by putting the needs of the claimant in the forefront of every conversation.

Notice of Determination-Ineligible

Although it may be difficult to understand the limitations of the program, be advised that this outcome does not diminish the significance of your experience as a person impacted by crime.

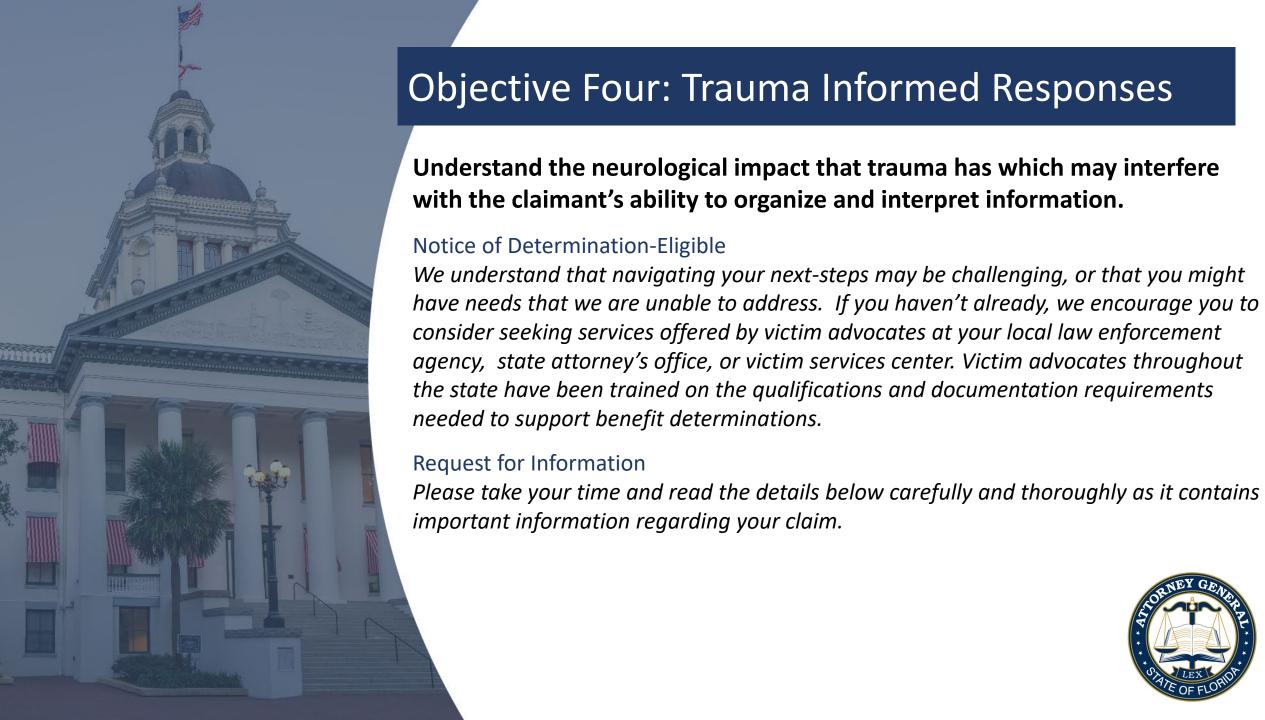
Notice of Determination-Eligible

Please know that we are sorry to hear about the circumstances which prompted you to apply for compensation. It is our goal to support you on your path to recovery and healing.

Request for Information

Being a person impacted by crime can cause overwhelming emotions or unwanted reactions, which are especially difficult to manage while coping with trauma.







Objective Five: Recognize Diverse Perspectives

Recognize that each claimant has unique experiences which may influence how information is perceived.

Notice of Determination-Ineligible

It is the duty of the Attorney General's Office to enforce the laws implemented by elected officials and governing authorities, including the disqualification(s) identified above.

Request for Information

Be aware that in many circumstances, we must include legal and technical language pertaining to statutes and administrative rules.

Request for Information

Possible outcomes may include a determination, processing of benefits or additional requests for supporting documentation specific to the benefit type requested.

Request for Information

To discuss this letter or to learn more about alternative resources, please contact the Bureau of Victim Compensation's Information and Referral Service at (800) 226-6667.





Michelle Crum, Chief Bureau of Victim Compensation

Michelle.Crum@MyFloridaLegal.com (850) 414-3391





Words have power



Self-Care



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Questions/Discussion





Session Wrap-Up



Contact us at: VOCACenter@ncja.org

or Call: 202-480-5551

The OVC Center for VOCA Administrators is supported by cooperative agreement number 2020-V3-GX-K052, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

