

# OFFICE OF THE VICTIM ADVOCATE

## *At a Glance*

**MICHELLE S. CRUZ, J.D. State Victim Advocate**

*Established – 1999*

*Statutory authority – CGS Sec. 46a-13b et seq.*

*Central office – 505 Hudson Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
Hartford, CT 06106*

*Website address – [www.ova.state.ct.us](http://www.ova.state.ct.us)*

*Email address – [Michelle.Cruz@ct.gov](mailto:Michelle.Cruz@ct.gov)*

*Number of employees – 3.5*

*Recurring operating expenses - \$377,284*

*Organizational structure – Independent Division of the Office of Governmental Accountability, for administrative purposes only.*

## **Mission**

*The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA), an independent Division of the Office of Governmental Accountability, advocates for the protection and promotion of the State Constitutional and statutory rights of crime victims throughout the state of Connecticut. The OVA monitors and evaluates the delivery of services to crime victims and works to advance the laws and policies throughout the state to promote the fair and just treatment of crime victims throughout the criminal justice system. The existence of the OVA provides oversight and advocacy when the criminal justice system fails crime victims. The OVA remains committed to ensuring that the voices of crime victims play a central role in Connecticut's response to violence and to those victimized by crime. Further, the OVA has a firm dedication to promoting awareness to Connecticut citizens as to the services available to crime victims through outreach, education and public service events.*

## **Statutory Responsibility**

The OVA monitors and evaluates the delivery of services to crime victims by state agencies and other entities that make up the victim service delivery system in the state. In fulfilling its mandate, the OVA accepts complaints from crime victims and/or others on behalf of the crime victim, who believe their rights have been or are being violated or who believe that the services available to them as crime victims in the state are being unfairly denied or inadequately provided. OVA may also receive complaints from

agencies, other institutions or individuals on behalf of crime victims. The OVA may, when appropriate, initiate an inquiry into such complaints or conduct an investigation. As an attorney, the State Victim Advocate may file a special limited appearance in any proceeding throughout the state to advocate for crime victims' rights. The OVA monitors the services provided by the State's Witness Protection Program and ensure a centralized location for victim services information. The OVA conducts programs of public education as well as recommends changes in legislation and/or policy to improve the delivery of services to crime victims.

### **Public Service**

The OVA constantly strives to appropriately address the concerns brought to the attention of the OVA by crime victims and those on behalf of crime victims. The OVA frequently meets with crime victims, state agencies who provide services to crime victims and other entities to discuss the handling of particular matters that may require action by the OVA. The OVA engages in regular contact with these individuals to obtain feedback regarding the effectiveness of the OVA's assistance on behalf of crime victims throughout the state. This feedback is invaluable in guiding the OVA to the best manner in which the OVA can continue to carry out its statutory mandates, always with an eye towards improving the quality of services available and providing a voice to crime victims. The OVA continues to provide education, outreach and training to enhance delivery of services to crime victims in Connecticut.

### **Improvements/Achievements 2010 - 11**

During its thirteenth year of operation, the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) continued to operate as a fully functional independent state agency committed to effectively and efficiently carrying out its statutory mandates. The following specific achievements in this regard are noted:

- The OVA regularly receives complaints from crime victims throughout the state alleging one or more violations of their legal rights as crime victims and/or some problem in the provision of services and the OVA continues to take appropriate action to effectively resolve the complaint or problem.
- The State Victim Advocate and the staff Attorney intervened in numerous court proceedings to effectively advocate for the enforcement of crime victim rights.
- The Victim Advocate co-sponsored the *15<sup>th</sup> Annual Melanie Rieger Conference Against Violence*. The Victim Advocate presented Crime Victim Assistance Awards to The Speaker of the House and the Speakers' Task Force on Domestic Violence for their dedication to improving the state's responsiveness to victims of domestic violence through enhancing awareness and improving the laws that impact victims of domestic violence
- The OVA currently has three full-time positions and one part-time position which include the State Victim Advocate, a Complaint Officer, a Staff Attorney and an Office Assistant. Additionally, the OVA utilizes interns, externs and volunteers to assist in several projects at the agency.

- The Victim Advocate has been consistently adding information to the OVA website in order to better inform crime victims of their rights and services available.
- The Victim Advocate and OVA staff made numerous public appearances throughout the state to publicize the existence and function of the OVA, in addition to informing citizens about victim rights in Connecticut.
- The State Victim Advocate was invited by the Kentucky Attorney General to participate in the AG's Annual Victims' Rights Conference and served as the Closing Key Note Speaker and held a break out session.
- The State Victim Advocate and OVA staff participate in numerous committees and commissions for the improvement of services to crime victims.
- The State Victim Advocate distributes a quarterly newsletter titled *The Victims' Voice*. *The Victims' Voice* includes, but is not limited to, articles, resources for crime victims and cold case information.
- The Victim Advocate initiated a formal investigation into facts and circumstances of the murder of Tiana Notice and the Murder of Shengyul Rasim. The detailed Investigative Report of the Murder of Tiana Notice was released in October of 2010. The Investigative Report has been utilized throughout the state to improve the delivery of services to crime victims, including, but not limited to, the Connecticut State Police, municipal police departments, and impacted the laws of CT through the work of the Speakers' task Force on Domestic Violence.
- The Office of the Victim Advocate hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual "Speakers' Bureau" DATE, 2011 for crime victims throughout the state of Connecticut to assist the OVA in presentations and outreach.
- The Victim Advocate in collaboration with the Greenwich Police Department and The Police Officers Standards and Training Council (POST) hosted a one day training event, at two separate venues, for law enforcement officials throughout the state on systemic issues surrounding the enforcement of protective and restraining orders in October 2010.

#### **Information Reported as Required by State Statute**

The OVA has complied with all of the requirements of all federal and state requirements regarding affirmative action and equal opportunity.