

## The Importance of Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services in the United States

Submitted by: Victim Services Committee

Co-Sponsored by: Police Investigative Operations Committee, Private Sector Liaison Section, Crime Prevention Committee, Juvenile Justice & Child Protection Committee, and Human & Civil

Rights Committee

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WHEREAS, in the United States, the number of persons age 12 or older who have been victims of violent crime rose from 2.7 million in 2015 to 2.9 million in 2016 and 3.1 million in 2017;<sup>1</sup> and

WHEREAS, in the United States, more than 1.2 million violent crimes, and 7.6 million property crimes were reported to the police in 2017;<sup>2</sup> and

WHEREAS, law enforcement officers serve an important role in the experience of many crime victims and are often the first point of contact for a victim after a crime has occurred; and

WHEREAS, research shows that victim advocacy services facilitate victim recovery and increase access to other services in the community, including the criminal justice system;<sup>3</sup> and

WHEREAS, a crime victim's perception of the criminal justice system can be impacted, either positively or negatively, by the manner in which they are treated from the first response throughout the follow-up investigation and beyond; and

WHEREAS, how law enforcement agencies treat victims is a direct reflection of each agency's philosophy of policing and core values; and

WHEREAS, recent statistics reveal that only 13% of U.S. law enforcement agencies report having a specialized Victim Services Unit with full- or part-time personnel;<sup>4</sup> and

WHEREAS, in the United States, there are now 41 states mandating that police notify crime victims about the existence of victim compensation opportunities;<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel E. Morgan and Jennifer L. Truman, *Criminal Victimization, 2017* (Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 2018), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv17.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2017*, Uniform Crime Reports, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2017/crime-in-the-u.s.-2017>.

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly A. Lonsway and Joanne Archambault, *Effective Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System* (End Violence Against Women International, updated June 2019), <https://www.evawintl.org/library/DocumentLibraryHandler.ashx?id=32>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS), 2013* (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2015), <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/studies/36164/version/2>.

<sup>5</sup> National Crime Victim Law Institute, "Victim Rights Laws by State," <https://law.lclark.edu/live/news/23544-victims-rights-law-by-state>.

WHEREAS, access to comprehensive victim services at the time of reporting to law enforcement may enhance victims' safety, the healing process, and their ability to participate in the criminal justice process; and

WHEREAS, each year the Crime Victims Fund makes funding available for state and local programs through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), and that funding can be used to support Victim Services Units that are embedded within law enforcement agencies, either by working independently or by working in cooperation with other similarly situated law enforcement agencies to provide regional services, yet these funds are underutilized by law enforcement agencies.<sup>6</sup> Now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that law enforcement agencies of all sizes take steps to establish and embed Victim Services Units into their operations by employing personnel or by developing formal partnerships with local victim services organizations<sup>7</sup> so that crime victims have immediate access to professional personnel who understand the complexities of trauma and victim needs; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that law enforcement executives demonstrate departmental and civic leadership by acknowledging the devastating impact that crime has on residents, and therefore take action to strengthen their ability to contribute to victim recovery and community resilience through on-site services and support by employing and embedding specialized victim services personnel, or through development of formal partnerships with victim services organizations; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the International Association of Chiefs of Police strongly urges state and local law enforcement agencies to work in collaboration with Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) administrators and local legislators in their states to identify opportunities and to allocate adequate funding for law enforcement-based victim services programs.

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<sup>6</sup> National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators, "State Administrator Directory," <https://navaa.org/state-administrator-directory>.

<sup>7</sup> IACP, *Establishing or Enhancing Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – What Are the Key Considerations?* Key Considerations (June 2019), 15–17.