



Office of Victim Services

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New York State Office of Victim Services' Transparency Plan

At the request of the Governor's Office, the New York State Office of Victim Services (OVS) developed this plan to promote greater transparency and accountability by making information more easily accessible to the public. Specifically, OVS proposes the following:

- Enhance OVS' social media presence:
 - OVS' social media messages are currently handled through the Division of Criminal Justice Services' (DCJS) @NYSPublicSafety - Twitter, NYSPublicSafety - Facebook, and NYSPublicSafety - YouTube. In an effort to enhance OVS' social media presence the agency proposes having its own social media pages. Survivors are more likely to search for information on a victim-oriented platform rather than a public safety labelled platform. Advocates are particularly sensitive to connecting victim services to law enforcement and would be more likely to refer survivors to independent OVS pages. Having something branded as OVS would have far more impact in educating the public about OVS than being included with public safety.
- Capitalize on and expand our technological tools:
 - **OVS Resource Connect** is a concern-based search engine designed to help victims of crime, and advocates, find resources provided by OVS-funded Victim Assistance Programs (VAPs) across New York State.
 - **VAP Connect** is an online community for OVS-funded VAPs. It was built as a member-based online forum, and provides a space for VAPs to come together, network and share valuable information and best practices with one another, while also staying in touch with the latest updates from OVS.
 - **Victim Services Portal (VSP)** allows for the on-line completion of claim applications, and the uploading of supporting documentation.

A claim number can be provided immediately, and information made available on the assigned Crime Victim Specialist once a claim is accepted. The VSP also allows advocates to check the status of claims.

- Commitment to Language Access
 - OVS actively participates in all of Chamber's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) initiatives, with a Senior Attorney representing the agency as our Language Access Coordinator. All critical documents are translated and available in Chamber's designated languages and OVS supports/assists victims and claimants in all languages through Language Line Solutions translation/interpretation services. OVS will work through social media and the advocacy community, including immigration services, to alert the public to this service.
- Ensure the timely preparation of legally mandated reporting and identify ways to make useful information available to the public.
 - OVS recommends streamlining the review process for items such as our Annual Report so that reports are made available in a timely manner. OVS has a statutorily required Annual Report. Pursuant to NYS Executive Law, section 623(20) the report is due to the Governor and the Legislature on or before December 1st of each year (reporting on the prior, full SFY). OVS is committed to complying with its statutory obligation to make the Annual Report available by the December 1st deadline.
 - The Legislature also created in our enacting statute [NYS Executive Law, section 623(21)] a Biennial Report, due to the Governor and the Legislature with no date specified. This report requires the assembly of information from other state agencies and authorities, law enforcement, presentment agencies, district attorneys, state law enforcement training facilities, social service agencies, courts across the state and the Unified Court System – none of which OVS has any authority over. Developing an appropriate and efficient method for collecting this data has presented challenges, OVS is committed to working with Chamber and stakeholders to comply with the law related to this Biennial Report, but the law as written is challenging and OVS would also like to explore making amendments to this requirement.
- Ensuring use of the Project Sunlight database in accordance with the Public Integrity Reform Act of 2011.
 - OVS Counsel ensures the use of the Project Sunlight database.
- Improve response time for all FOIL requests, including by tracking monthly backlogs of outstanding requests and new requests, and by proactively posting frequently requested information of completed requests online.

- OVS is a small agency, with one employee (Counsel) designated as the agency's FOIL Records Access Officer. OVS receives approximately 60-80 FOILs per calendar year. OVS over the past decade or so has never had a FOIL backlog.
 - Of the FOILs received by OVS, the most frequently requested information is related to the confidential claims and related records which we receive and process. These records are not subject to FOIL, and the vast majority of FOIL responses are denials, made concurrently with the 5-day acknowledgement letters. On the handful of occasions that a FOIL request is not responded to 5 days after receipt, most are responded to within the 20-day timeframe. Annually, there are very few instances when the agency specifies that more time is needed due to the nature of the request.
 - A weekly report of outstanding FOILS is compiled and shared with Chamber Foil counsel assigned to OVS. In addition, flagged FOILs are reported bi-weekly to the Portfolio Deputy Secretary and in the PIO Red/Green report.
- Comply fully with Executive Order 8.95 - Using Technology to Promote Transparency, Improve Government Performance and Enhance Citizen Engagement – Open Data NY.
 - OVS is currently determining business requirements for publishing aggregated crime victim compensation claims data to Open Data NY. To ensure data meets the needs of the agency's stakeholders, the development of publicly available datasets and figures will be based on past requests for information.
 - Published data may include percent of claims awarded applications submitted, total dollars paid to claimants on a monthly basis, and aggregated demographic claimant information. The data described above could be stratified by claim type, crime type, or presented in a manner to determine trends over time.
 - OVS recently hired a Business Systems Analyst to support the agency in these efforts.
- OVS does not conduct public meetings, but in the event that such meetings are to be conducted in the future, OVS will be mindful to post the documents required for any such meetings at the same time the agenda is posted, to the extent practicable.
- Reduce or eliminate the costs associated with providing data or records.
 - OVS efforts to publicly post aggregate data will reduce the administrative burden associated with responding to ad hoc requests. It will also assist the PIO in responding to press inquiries.

- Updating record retention policies including ensuring the timely transfer of pertinent records to the State Archives.
 - OVS will review current record retention practices to ensure records are being transferred in accordance with policies and procedures.
- Increasing participation of agency personnel in community events and town meetings and providing new avenues for public participation in government decision-making.
 - OVS staff will attend numerous events throughout the State during National Crime Victims' Rights Week; attend coalition meetings regularly; speak at crime victim related events; host tables at conferences and other meetings.
- In September of 2021 OVS created, and filled, a new position the Community Engagement Liaison. The purpose of this position is to:
 - identify existing state, local, and federal resources for victims and work to remove barriers that are preventing the State and partners from meeting the needs of victims of crime;
 - identify how State and local agencies, NGOs, and other allied professionals can improve collaboration to enhance services to crime victims in one or more of the following:
 - (1) crime victims who reside in rural/tribal areas; and/or
 - (2) older victims (aged 60 years or older) of any crime; and/or
 - (3) victims of violent crime;
 - meet with community stakeholders to identify the needs in one or more of the three areas and develop strategies to address those needs;
 - develop concrete recommendations and an implementation plan to enhance services in the areas;
 - implement the strategies and recommendations.
 - assess the effectiveness of the implementation; and
 - conduct a series of comprehensive strategic planning sessions, as appropriate, with State and community stakeholders. Through partnerships, criteria will be developed to best determine strategies and effective collaborative models for planning, implementing, and evaluating the proposed innovations in the State and/or communities. Comprehensive strategic planning sessions should elicit the experiences and perspectives of crime victims, various stakeholders, victim services providers, and State agencies that are directly impacted by the intended innovation.
 - This position will also represent OVS at events where target populations and networking connections are present including but

not limited to meetings, panels, conferences, and public events. It is also envisioned that this position will engage with the OVS Advisory Council to better facilitate the exchange of ideas and

improve communication between OVS and the providers we fund, and the communities they serve and represent.

- This new position will work with our Program Outreach Specialists, our PIO and the units within OVS to develop more comprehensive and collaborative relationships with the provider coalitions in New York State and the statewide coalitions such as NYSCADV and NYSCASA.
- OVS leadership, and this new position will meet with community stakeholders to identify the community needs of crime victims and develop strategies to address those needs. Specifically, the targeting of services to underserved populations and the creation of a NYS data driven definition of underserved populations will be undertaken. As part of this process OVS intends to conduct a needs assessment for the whole State. The results of this needs assessment could be made available.
- This position will also facilitate efforts to inform crime victims on relevant OVS services.