

Federal Crime Victims' Rights Act (VRA)

18 U.S. Code § 3771 - Crime victims' rights

(a) Rights of Crime Victims.—A [crime victim](#) has the following rights:

The right to be reasonably protected from the accused.

The right to reasonable, accurate, and timely notice of any public court proceeding, or any parole proceeding, involving the crime or of any release or escape of the accused.

The right not to be excluded from any such public court proceeding, unless the court, after receiving clear and convincing evidence, determines that testimony by the victim would be materially altered if the victim heard other testimony at that proceeding.

The right to be reasonably heard at any public proceeding in the district court involving release, plea, sentencing, or any parole proceeding.

The reasonable right to confer with the attorney for the Government in the case.

The right to full and timely restitution as provided in law.

The right to proceedings free from unreasonable delay.

The right to be treated with fairness and with respect for the victim's dignity and privacy.

The right to be informed in a timely manner of any plea bargain or deferred prosecution agreement.

The right to be informed of the rights under this section and the services described in section 503(c) of the Victims' Rights and Restitution Act of 1990 ([42 U.S.C. 10607\(c\)](#)) [1] and provided contact information for the Office of the Victims' Rights Ombudsman of the Department of Justice.

(b) Rights Afforded.—

(1) In general.—

In any court proceeding involving an offense against a [crime victim](#), the court shall ensure that the [crime victim](#) is afforded the rights described in subsection (a). Before making a determination described in subsection (a)(3), the court shall make every effort to permit the fullest attendance possible by the victim and shall consider reasonable alternatives to the exclusion of the victim from the criminal proceeding. The reasons for any decision denying relief under this chapter shall be clearly stated on the record.

(2) Habeas corpus proceedings.—

(A) In general.—

In a Federal habeas corpus proceeding arising out of a State conviction, the court shall ensure that a [crime victim](#) is afforded the rights described in paragraphs (3), (4), (7), and (8) of subsection (a).

(B) Enforcement.—

(i) In general.—

These rights may be enforced by the [crime victim](#) or the [crime victim](#)'s lawful representative in the manner described in paragraphs (1) and (3) of subsection (d).

(ii) Multiple victims.—

In a case involving multiple victims, subsection (d)(2) shall also apply.

(C) Limitation.—

This paragraph relates to the duties of a court in relation to the rights of a [crime victim](#) in Federal habeas corpus proceedings arising out of a State conviction, and does not give rise to any obligation or requirement applicable to personnel of any agency of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government.

(D) Definition.—

For purposes of this paragraph, the term “[crime victim](#)” means the person against whom the State offense is committed or, if that person is killed or incapacitated, that person's family member or other lawful representative.

(c) Best Efforts To Accord Rights.—

(1) Government.—

Officers and employees of the Department of Justice and other departments and agencies of the United States engaged in the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime shall make their best efforts to see that [crime victims](#) are notified of, and accorded, the rights described in subsection (a).

(2) Advice of attorney.—

The prosecutor shall advise the [crime victim](#) that the [crime victim](#) can seek the advice of an attorney with respect to the rights described in subsection (a).

(3) Notice.—

Notice of release otherwise required pursuant to this chapter shall not be given if such notice may endanger the safety of any person.

(d) Enforcement and Limitations.—

(1) Rights.—

The [crime victim](#) or the [crime victim](#)'s lawful representative, and the attorney for the Government may assert the rights described in subsection (a). A person accused of the crime may not obtain any form of relief under this chapter.

(2) Multiple crime victims.—

In a case where the court finds that the number of [crime victims](#) makes it impracticable to accord all of the [crime victims](#) the rights described in subsection (a), the court shall fashion a reasonable procedure to give effect to this chapter that does not unduly complicate or prolong the proceedings.

(3) Motion for relief and writ of mandamus.—

The rights described in subsection (a) shall be asserted in the district court in which a defendant is being prosecuted for the crime or, if no prosecution is underway, in the district court in the district in

which the crime occurred. The district court shall take up and decide any motion asserting a victim's right forthwith. If the district court denies the relief sought, the movant may petition the [court of appeals](#) for a writ of mandamus. The [court of appeals](#) may issue the writ on the order of a single judge pursuant to circuit rule or the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure. The [court of appeals](#) shall take up and decide such application forthwith within 72 hours after the petition has been filed, unless the litigants, with the approval of the court, have stipulated to a different time period for consideration. In deciding such application, the [court of appeals](#) shall apply ordinary standards of appellate review. In no event shall proceedings be stayed or subject to a continuance of more than five days for purposes of enforcing this chapter. If the [court of appeals](#) denies the relief sought, the reasons for the denial shall be clearly stated on the record in a written opinion.

(4) Error.—

In any appeal in a criminal case, the Government may assert as error the district court's denial of any [crime victim](#)'s right in the proceeding to which the appeal relates.

(5) Limitation on relief.—In no case shall a failure to afford a right under this chapter provide grounds for a new trial. A victim may make a motion to re-open a plea or sentence only if—

(A) the victim has asserted the right to be heard before or during the proceeding at issue and such right was denied;

(B) the victim petitions the [court of appeals](#) for a writ of mandamus within 14 days; and

(C) in the case of a plea, the accused has not pled to the highest offense charged.

This paragraph does not affect the victim's right to restitution as provided in title 18, United States Code.

(6) No cause of action.—

Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to authorize a cause of action for damages or to create, to enlarge, or to imply any duty or obligation to any victim or other person for the breach of which the United States or any of its officers or employees could be held liable in damages. Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to impair the prosecutorial discretion of the Attorney General or any officer under his direction.

(e) Definitions.—For the purposes of this chapter:

(1) Court of appeals.—The term “[court of appeals](#)” means—

(A) the United States [court of appeals](#) for the judicial district in which a defendant is being prosecuted; or

(B) for a prosecution in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, the District of Columbia [Court of Appeals](#).

(2) Crime victim.—

(A) In general.—

The term “[crime victim](#)” means a person directly and proximately harmed as a result of the commission of a Federal offense or an offense in the District of Columbia.

(B) Minors and certain other victims.—

In the case of a [crime victim](#) who is under 18 years of age, incompetent, incapacitated, or deceased, the legal guardians of the [crime victim](#) or the representatives of the [crime victim](#)'s estate, family members, or any other persons appointed as suitable by the court, may assume the [crime victim](#)'s rights under this chapter, but in no event shall the defendant be named as such guardian or representative.

(3) District court; court.—

The terms “district court” and “court” include the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

(f) Procedures To Promote Compliance.—

(1) Regulations.—

Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this chapter, the Attorney General of the United States shall promulgate regulations to enforce the rights of [crime victims](#) and to ensure compliance by responsible officials with the obligations described in law respecting [crime victims](#).

(2) Contents.—The regulations promulgated under paragraph (1) shall—

(A) designate an administrative authority within the Department of Justice to receive and investigate complaints relating to the provision or violation of the rights of a [crime victim](#);

(B) require a course of training for employees and offices of the Department of Justice that fail to comply with provisions of Federal law pertaining to the treatment of [crime victims](#), and otherwise assist such employees and offices in responding more effectively to the needs of [crime victims](#);

(C) contain disciplinary sanctions, including suspension or termination from employment, for employees of the Department of Justice who willfully or wantonly fail to comply with provisions of Federal law pertaining to the treatment of [crime victims](#); and

(D) provide that the Attorney General, or the designee of the Attorney General, shall be the final arbiter of the complaint, and that there shall be no judicial review of the final decision of the Attorney General by a complainant.

(Added [Pub. L. 108–405, title I, § 102\(a\)](#), Oct. 30, 2004, [118 Stat. 2261](#); amended [Pub. L. 109–248, title II, § 212](#), July 27, 2006, [120 Stat. 616](#); [Pub. L. 111–16, § 3\(12\)](#), May 7, 2009, [123 Stat. 1608](#); [Pub. L. 114–22, title I, § 113\(a\)](#), (c)(1), May 29, 2015, [129 Stat. 240](#), 241.)

Federal Crime Victims' Rights and Restitution Act

Updated Guidelines

The VRRRA provides the following description of services to Victims at 34 U.S.C. § 20141(c):

(1) A responsible official shall--

(A) inform a victim of the place where the victim may receive emergency medical and social services;

(B) inform a victim of any restitution or other relief to which the victim may be entitled under this or any other law and1 manner in which such relief may be obtained;

(C) inform a victim of public and private programs that are available to provide counseling, treatment, and other support to the victim; and

(D) assist a victim in contacting the persons who are responsible for providing the services and relief described in subparagraphs (A), (B), and (C).

(2) A responsible official shall arrange for a victim to receive reasonable protection from a suspected offender and persons acting in concert with or at the behest of the suspected offender.

(3) During the investigation and prosecution of a crime, a responsible official shall provide a victim the earliest possible notice of--

(A) the status of the investigation of the crime, to the extent it is appropriate to inform the victim and to the extent that it will not interfere with the investigation;

(B) the arrest of a suspected offender;

(C) the filing of charges against a suspected offender;

(D) the scheduling of each court proceeding that the witness is either required to attend or, under section 10606(b)(4) of Title 42, is entitled to attend;

(E) the release or detention status of an offender or suspected offender;

(F) the acceptance of a plea of guilty or nolo contendere or the rendering of a verdict after trial; and

(G) the sentence imposed on an offender, including the date on which the offender will be eligible for parole.

(4) During court proceedings, a responsible official shall ensure that a victim is provided a waiting area removed from and out of the sight and hearing of the defendant and defense witnesses.

(5) After trial, a responsible official shall provide a victim the earliest possible notice of--

(A) the scheduling of a parole hearing for the offender;

(B) the escape, work release, furlough, or any other form of release from custody of the offender; and

(C) the death of the offender, if the offender dies while in custody.

(6) At all times, a responsible official shall ensure that any property of a victim that is being held for evidentiary purposes be maintained in good condition and returned to the victim as soon as it is no longer needed for evidentiary purposes.

(7) The Attorney General or the head of another department or agency that conducts an investigation of a sexual assault shall pay, either directly or by reimbursement of payment by the victim, the cost of a physical examination of the victim which an investigating officer determines was necessary or useful for evidentiary purposes. The Attorney General shall provide for the payment of the cost of up to 2 anonymous and confidential tests of the victim for sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, gonorrhea, herpes, chlamydia, and syphilis, during the 12 months following sexual assaults that pose a risk of transmission, and the cost of a counseling session by a medically trained professional on the accuracy of such tests and the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases to the victim as the result of the assault. A victim may waive anonymity and confidentiality of any tests paid for under this section.

(8) A responsible official shall provide the victim with general information regarding the corrections process, including information about work release, furlough, probation, and eligibility for each.

Under the VRRRA, a crime victim is a person who has suffered direct physical, emotional, or pecuniary (financial) harm as a result of a crime. If a crime victim is under 18 years of age, incompetent, incapacitated, or deceased, services should be provided to one of the following representatives of the victim (in order of preference): a spouse, legal guardian, parent, child, sibling, another family member, or another person designated by the court. More than one victim representative can be identified and provided with services depending on the circumstances. Under no circumstances shall a person culpable (responsible) for the crime be treated as a representative of a victim.

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