



News for Immediate Release

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Pennsylvania Honors Crime Victims, Focuses on Right to Restitution

Harrisburg – More than \$761 million in restitution is owed to Pennsylvania's crime victims, and a newly-formed task force plans to examine the process in an effort to find a better way to help victims and their communities get the reimbursements they deserve.

Commonwealth Victim Advocate Carol Lavery today announced the formation of the Restitution Task Force, which coincides with Crime Victims' Rights Week in Pennsylvania as proclaimed by Governor Tom Corbett. This week is also National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

The task force is comprised of representatives from all three branches of state government, counties, the criminal and juvenile justice systems, advocacy groups and crime victims.

Members will examine the restitution laws, rules, policies and processes currently in place in Pennsylvania and submit its final report in December to the governor, judiciary and legislative leaders.

"Ensuring that restitution is ordered and collected is a victim's right that has been especially challenging," Lavery said. "I am proud to announce the establishment of the task force during this special week dedicated to honoring victims of crime."

The ability to help a victim recover financially and psychologically is a right protected by law, Lavery added. It recognizes the victim's injuries as well as the offender's obligation to make amends through restitution and other means.

"Pennsylvania's court system has been focused on improving the collection of fines, fees and costs for some time. Enhancing restitution services is important not only in and of itself, but also as a part of what we've been doing more broadly," Pennsylvania Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille said.

"It is encouraging and energizing to partner with others who are passionate about collecting restitution and making crime victims whole," said Don O'Shell, York County Clerk of Courts and chairman of the collections enforcement/disbursement subcommittee of the task force. "A diverse group of experienced professionals has been assembled who will bring valuable perspectives to this effort."

“Victims need money to pay for medical bills and counseling services related to the crime, small business owners may need the money to keep their business open, and the elderly need to be reimbursed if they have lost their life savings,” said Pam Grosh, director of Lancaster County’s victim/witness program.

The statewide figure of more than \$761 million in owed restitution “is a staggering amount that reflects thousands of victims who are without the resources they need to rebuild their lives after crime,” Grosh said.

Visit the Pennsylvania Office of the Victim Advocate online at www.ova.state.pa.us.

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