



News for Immediate Release

Feb. 12, 2013

Restitution in Pennsylvania Task Force Calls for Changes to Help Crime Victims, Hold Offenders Accountable

Harrisburg – The Restitution in Pennsylvania Task Force today released its report with recommendations to significantly improve state laws and procedures related to the quality of restitution ordering, collection and disbursement to crime victims.

"Restitution is a restorative justice concept that recognizes the harm to individual victims and attempts to repair the damage caused by the crime," Victim Advocate Carol Lavery said. "It is inherently rehabilitative as it holds the offender accountable and provides the opportunity to right a wrong."

Data show that \$434 million in restitution was assessed and \$50 million was collected statewide over the past three years. The collection rate is affected by practical factors, including that 33 percent of those assessed are incarcerated, but this report highlights several ways that collection of restitution can be improved.

The 39-member Task Force, chaired by Lavery, was comprised of representatives from all three branches of state government, counties, the criminal and juvenile justice systems, advocacy groups and crime victims.

The members met over a 12-month period to determine how to maximize the reimbursement of financial losses to crime victims. The Task Force's 47 recommendations are grouped into four categories:

- Uniformity of Practice
- Strengthening Accountability
- Coordination of Information
- Expansion of Authority

Some of the recommendations of the task force include the establishment of restitution funds and restitution programs throughout both the criminal and juvenile justice systems, placing defendants on a single electronic payment plan to ensure that prior, older cases are not neglected in favor of the most current case, and legislation to authorize courts to order wage attachment for defendants who have been found in contempt for nonpayment of restitution, costs or fines.

"The release of this report represents a starting point, not a conclusion. We have much more work to do together as we promote and implement best practices and

seek additional collections enforcement measures as outlined in the report," said Don O'Shell, York County Clerk of Courts and chairman of the collections and disbursement subcommittee of the task force. "The challenges ahead require effort and perseverance. Regardless of the barriers, our focus must remain on providing justice to victims of crime doing all we can to ensure full and timely restitution."

"Providing restitution to crime victims is a major priority of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system, and we look forward to continuing this important work to develop an implementation strategy related to the juvenile justice recommendations contained in this report," said James Anderson, Executive Director of the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission and chairman of the juvenile justice subcommittee of the task force.

The complete report is online at www.PA-RestitutionTaskForce.info

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

Media contact: Sherry Tate, 717-787-6208
Carol Lavery, 717- 214-2256

Editor's Note: The amount of restitution owed by county based on data provided by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts can be found in Part IV: Appendices of the report.

###