

Bringing ★ ★ Honor to Victims ★★

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION & PUBLIC SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES

PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Bring added awareness and recognition to your National Crime Victims' Rights Week activities with an official Proclamation or Resolution. A **Proclamation** is made by an elected or appointed executive, such as the Governor, County Executive, or Mayor, while a **Resolution** is adopted by a legislative body, such as your state legislature or county or city council. An official Proclamation or Resolution can also be an important step in securing the participation of government officials and attention by the media, adding local prestige to all your week's events.

A sample Proclamation and sample Resolution are included in the Sample Section of the Resource Guide, along with a sample letter requesting a Proclamation or Resolution.

PUBLIC SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES

National Crime Victims' Rights Week provides a number of public speaking opportunities, whether as part of an annual award ceremony for friends and colleagues, or outreach to new audiences. Many local organizations put on regular meetings and conferences, and are frequently looking for outside experts to educate their membership about specific issues. Consider contacting your local Kiwanis or Rotary Clubs, the local Chamber of Commerce, or the local chapter of the League of Women Voters. Local hospitals and businesses frequently host speakers to help educate their staff members about important issues.

Speech Bites

While any speech should include the local concerns and achievements of crime victims and their supporters, the Speech Bites offered below can be inserted into your remarks to underscore this year's NCVRW theme, *Bringing Honor to Victims*.

The role of victim service providers:

★ So much of what we do, as victim service providers, is to bring honor to victims.

- ★ When we help them access the resources they need – from financial resources like crime victim compensation or restitution, to emotional support and counseling – we bring honor to victims.
 - ★ When we give them the information they need to make their own choices, we bring honor to victims.
 - ★ When we help them to plan for their own safety, we bring honor to victims.
 - ★ When we help them set the terms of their interaction with the media, we bring honor to victims.
 - ★ When we make sure they have the opportunity to participate in the criminal justice process, and are consulted before a plea agreement is entered in their case, we bring honor to victims.
 - ★ When we help provide them an opportunity to voice the harm sustained as a result of crime, we bring honor to victims.
 - ★ When we support them in their quest for justice, whether in the criminal or civil court system, we bring honor to victims.
 - ★ Through our advocacy efforts, when we work to ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect, we bring honor to victims.
- We honor victims not through an award, but through a response:**
- ★ Bringing honor to victims isn't a simple ceremony. It isn't an award. It is a collective response to crime victims, recognizing the harm they've sustained, helping them rebuild. In a sense, this is what the entire crime victims' rights movement has been about: bringing honor to victims.
 - ★ Providing victims the rights to be informed, present and heard in a government proceeding that significantly impacts their interests honors victims.
 - ★ Thirty years ago, victims were rarely informed of court proceedings or, if they were, were not informed when those proceedings were cancelled or postponed. Victims were given the clear message that their time was not

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valuable. Now we routinely make an effort to keep victims informed throughout the criminal justice process.

★ Until recently, victims didn't have a right to speak at sentencing. While witnesses were allowed to plead for leniency for a convicted offender, the victim or survivors were told they had to remain silent about the harm they'd suffered.

★ Today, every state provides basic rights to victims of crime. In these areas and more, the victims' rights movement has brought honor to victims.

We must do more:

★ But we have far to go. Until we provide some redress for victims' grievances, we do not honor victims. Violations of the rights of victims must have some consequence. Victims' rights must be meaningful, and they must be enforceable.

★ Our victims' rights amendment (statutes) give victims a right to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect. Do we always do that? Do we treat all victims fairly – even when they disagree with the system about the desired outcome of the case? Do we show respect for victims by seeking their input as cases progress through the system? When we can answer, "Yes, always," then we can be said to truly honor victims.

Victims rights for all:

★ Are victims honored when they are told they only have rights when they come to the case with clean hands? When a young rape victim is told that because of her underage drinking, she'll be charged with a crime if she reports her rape? When the mother of a young murder victim is told she has no rights because her son was a

gang member at the time of his murder? No. We must do more.

★ We must lead the nation in recognizing that no one deserves to be a victim of crime, and that all victims deserve basic rights and services. We must move the concept of victims' rights and services from a "privilege" to be conferred on those who deserve it, to a fundamental right due to all who become victims of crime.

Victims of crime bring honor to us:

★ Many victims of crime have translated their pain into action to make a change, bringing honor to all of us. Survivors of domestic abuse have fought to ensure that future victims will be protected, creating battered women's shelters and support programs. Survivors of sexual assault have worked to ensure other victims won't have to go it alone, forming rape crisis centers and response teams.

★ Victims of all types of crime have banded together to guarantee that future victims would have a place in the criminal justice process, working to put crime victims' rights in state constitutions. These victims honor us, creating a safer, stronger community and a fairer, stronger criminal justice system.

REACHING OUT TO THE FAITH COMMUNITY

Members of the clergy and religious communities are often the first people victims turn to when their lives are in crisis. As guides for the ideals of justice and compassion, leaders in the faith community can serve as important messengers during National Crime Victims' Rights Week and throughout the year. Victim advocates should contact members of the faith community to let them know how important their voices are as our communities respond to victims of crime.

Faith-based Messages

The following suggested faith-based messages may provide a useful starting point for faith leaders willing to speak to these issues.

National Crime Victims' Rights Week:

★ This week, we honor victims of crime. National Crime Victims' Rights Week provides us an opportunity to reflect on those who have been confronted by darkness, and did not succumb. Those who have come face to face with evil—whether from strangers or those they thought close to them—and have found the strength to persevere.

★ We are a diverse community. We know we are not immune from crime. Many among us have experienced family violence, child abuse, or sexual assault, or been defrauded by someone we trusted. Some of us have even lost a friend or loved one to drunk driving or homicide. We know that the journey of healing and restoration can be long, and we as a community must be willing to support each other on that journey.

Our response:

★ When we as a people of faith respond to crime victims, we say to them, "What happened to you was wrong, and we will stand with you. We will help you to rebuild your lives. We will help you to regain your faith.

★ We say to victims we support your quest for justice. Justice is not vengeance, it is righteous. It is holding perpetrators accountable for the harm they have caused.

★ We can be the rock that supports victims of crime as they work to restore their sense of safety, of order, and of community. We can support victims in the decisions they make during their recovery, and to ask them what they need from us.