

New Directions from the Field:

Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century

Recommendations for Corrections

The recommendations below, which appear in the May 1998 *New Directions* Report, have been reformatted for replication and distribution.

Over the past decade, the basic philosophy of correctional agencies has undergone radical change. Traditionally, correctional agencies viewed their role as limited to offender management, supervision, and rehabilitation. Today, serving crime victims is also widely accepted as an important part of their mission. Increasingly, correctional agencies are recognizing that victims are important clients who need diverse and vital services. There is, however, a need for greater consistency between correctional agencies nationwide in program services, departmental policies and procedures, and compliance with victim-related laws. To better address this lack of continuity between correctional agencies, the following recommendations are set forth by the field:

1. Adult and juvenile correctional agencies should open channels of communication with the community and with crime victims. As a first step, every State department of corrections and paroling authority should establish a victim advisory committee that includes victims and service providers to guide and support victim-related policies, programs, and services.
2. Correctional agencies should designate staff to provide information, assistance, and referrals to victims of crime.
3. Mission statements guiding adult and juvenile correctional agencies and paroling authorities should recognize victims as an important constituency and address victims rights and services.
4. Correctional agencies should notify victims, upon their request, of any change in the status of offenders, including clemency or pardon, that would allow them to have access to the community or the victims.
5. Correctional agencies should place a high priority on ensuring the protection of victims from inmate intimidation, threats, or physical or other harm from offenders under their supervision.
6. Correctional agencies should make information about offender status and victims rights accessible to crime victims through multilingual, toll-free numbers, and printed materials.
7. Correctional agencies should collect and distribute restitution payments consistent with the court's order to ensure that victims receive fair compensation from offenders who are incarcerated or released on probation or parole. Wage-earning opportunities for inmates, wards, and parolees owing restitution should be increased. Restitution and other compensatory sanctions must be enforced, including requiring the timely payment of restitution as an automatic, essential condition of probation and parole. Paroling authorities should have the authority to both order restitution and incorporate a judicial restitution order as a condition of parole. Statutes should be amended to provide that any damages awarded to offenders from civil suits brought against correctional institutions be applied first to any outstanding restitution or civil judgments.
8. Victims should have input into all decisions affecting the release of adult and juvenile offenders. Input can be provided through oral statements; written, audio- or videotaped victim impact statements; and video teleconferences of postconviction hearings. Victim impact statements should be included in all presentence reports for adult and juvenile offenders.
9. Special consideration should be given to the needs of victims who participate in parole proceedings, especially when these proceedings are conducted within prisons. Correctional facilities should provide victims with an orientation to the proceedings and separate waiting areas away from the offender's family and friends.

10. Information regarding the rights and needs of crime victims should be incorporated into education for correctional staff at all levels, including administrative and line staff. When possible, interdisciplinary training programs should be conducted with other victim service providers. All agency staff and parole board members should be educated on the impact of victimization and victim services as part of their job orientation and in ongoing in-service training. This training should include issues of cultural sensitivity.
11. Each correctional agency should establish written policies and procedures for responding to correctional staff who are victimized on or off the job, as well as for responding to critical incidents within correctional institutions. Correctional agencies should provide training on the impact of crime for staff and supervisory personnel, beginning with basic academy training.
12. To increase offender awareness of the consequences of their actions on victims lives, correctional agencies for both adult and juvenile offenders should use victim impact panels and conduct courses about the effects of crime on peoples lives.
13. Victim-offender dialogue programs that ensure voluntary victim involvement, protect and support victims, and use highly trained facilitators and mediators should be available for victims upon their request.
14. Crime victims should be notified of any violation of the conditions of an offender's probation or parole and should be allowed to provide input prior to or during the probation or parole violation hearing.
15. When a sex offender is released, uniform community notification practices should be developed and implemented to promote public awareness and provide consistent protection for citizens from State to State.