

# OVS Outreach

Fall 2019

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## From the Director's Desk



November 11 is Veterans Day. First established as “Armistice Day” on the one-year anniversary of the end of World War I, this national holiday honors all American veterans who served their country, whether living or

deceased. Some form of the holiday is recognized in Canada, Britain and Europe, all on or around November 11.

With over 800,000 veterans in New York State, and over half of this population over the age of 65, veterans are a population with unique needs. Not only can veterans be vulnerable to crimes such as domestic violence, elder abuse and sexual assault, their past experiences with direct and vicarious trauma mean that specialized targeted services may be required to provide effective services and treatment.

To the victim advocacy and service provider programs in New York that can assist victims who are veterans: Thank you. Your support and resources can make such a difference for those who served our nation.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Cronin, Esq.

## OVS Re-Launches Training & Technical Assistance Request Program



Beginning October 1, 2019, OVS is re-launching the [Training and Technical Assistance Request Program](#), which connects state-funded victim assistance providers with free training to enhance their operations and better serve victims of crime across New York.

Modeled after similar Office of Victims of Crime TTAC efforts, this New York State program allows victim assistance providers to submit their request online to OVS, which can then connect them with a consultant who devises a training to meet the provider's needs.

In 2018, TTARP was piloted for six months and successfully aided more than 400 trainees from over 20 victim assistance providers.

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## A Message from NYS Division of Veterans' Services: Partnering with OVS to More Commonly Serve

Sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Here at the [New York State Division of Veterans' Services \(NYS DVS\)](#), we mean business when working with our partnering state agencies to create holistic government approaches to addressing needs of those we serve. In our emerging relationship with the Office of Victim Services (OVS), we want you to know that when it comes to addressing the needs of crime victims who served in our nation's armed forces, we are dedicated to ensuring they receive the benefits they earned in service to our nation. We are committed to working with those who seek to improve the lives of Veterans who may have been taken advantage of, or found themselves in need of, legal services.

Proudly, and as of this year, 15 different law schools across New York are working with the NYS DVS to offer pro-bono legal services for Veterans, with each clinic focusing on various topics that help create strategies for faculty, students, and community partners to better assist Veterans and their families with unmet legal needs, free of charge.

Collectively, these clinics help Veterans in many ways, from those who were improperly discharged from the military based on their sexual orientation, to those dealing with improper foreclosures or debt collections, and even a legal center that addresses bankruptcy, complex housing cases, and tax law – the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In a nation where only seven percent of the population has served in its nation's armed forces, the more information and understanding about the challenges Veterans face and how we can address them, the better we can all be at assisting and advocating on their behalf.

OVS and DVS make great partners when we work together to commonly serve New York's citizens.

If you, or someone you know, served in the armed forces, please call 888.838.7697 to schedule an appointment with a Veterans Benefits Advisors. ■



## OVS 2019 Conference: SOLD OUT

We have been so pleased with the response to the OVS 2019 Conference and wanted to thank everyone for their interest and enthusiasm for this event. As a result, the OVS 2019 Conference, *Innovation in Victim Services: Transforming the Field through Creative Solutions* (November 19-21, 2019 in Albany, NY) has officially been **sold out**.

Despite being sold out, we do maintain a waitlist. If you are interested in joining this waitlist, visit the [OVS 2019 Conference](#) registration page and click REGISTER. There you will be prompted to add your name and contact information.

In the event of participant cancellations (**tickets are non-transferable**), tickets for the conference will be released through Eventbrite in waitlist numerical order. ■



## OVS Grants Staff Attend Veterans Human Rights Conference

OVS staff are encouraged to attend conferences and programs to learn more about this work, victimization, new issues in the field, and especially to identify underserved populations. One of those underserved populations are veterans and as a result, OVS staff have been reaching out to learn more about what their needs are and how we can better serve them. Recently, one of our Grants staff attended the below conference, and this is his story. What we learn from these trainings may not always be specifically about crime victimization, but we do get a better understanding about other things such as trauma response. Moreover, it sometimes becomes clear that even crime victims often do not self-identify as such.

*On September 5, the New York State Division of Veterans' Services and the New York State Division of Human Rights hosted their 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference – "Thank You for Your Service" A Human Rights Conference for Veterans, Service Members, their Families, and their Advocates. The conference, held at The Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University, featured a variety of speakers whose experiences and expertise are directly related to the legal and human rights of veterans and service members.*

*Highlights included veterans and veterans service workers focusing on the need to remove the stigma veterans face after experience life-altering traumas.*

*Susanna Laruccia, an attorney at Veterans Rights Project talked about the demand across the country for attorneys who specialize in veterans' legal rights. She has worked with veterans who had no idea they were eligible for a pension through the Veterans Pension benefit. Other attorneys spoke about their work with incarcerated veterans, particularly as many suffer from PTSD. It was mentioned that many veterans are represented by public defenders who are often not trained to represent veterans who suffer from PTSD, reiterating the demand for attorneys that focus on veterans' legal rights.*

*We also heard from The Veterans Law Student Association (VLSA) at Hofstra Law, an organization of students, service members, and staff interested in providing advocacy to veterans by collaborating with the Hofstra's Veterans Advocacy Program (VAP). VAP also offers legal assistance to veterans through Veterans Legal Assistance Project (VLAP), a pro bono program that specializes in assisting veterans with assistance claims as well as improving access for Nassau County veterans to receive free legal services. The program allows students an opportunity to work with expert attorneys who focus on assisting veterans. They help veterans appeal denied disability claims, increase financial benefits where justified, apply for discharge upgrades, and more. VLAP has provided free legal services to nearly 400 military veterans and regularly offers a free one-day legal assistance clinic to all veterans.*

*Overall, this conference helped to illuminate the immediate need for more focus on the unique challenges our veterans face after returning from combat, and the different organizations who are working to support them. I left feeling more knowledgeable, as well as hopeful, knowing that these organizations exist. ■*



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Director McDonough presenting the opening remarks for our fifth #Veterans Human Rights Conference @Hofstra\_Law along with our partner @NYSHumanRights !



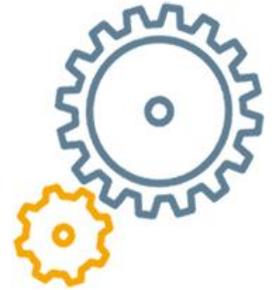
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## OVS Training & Technical Assistance Request Program Re-Launch (*continued*)

Eligible Victim Assistance Programs (VAPs) interested in TTARP can select a service or training topic from a [catalogue](#) and submit a formal training or technical assistance request [online](#). Requests will be considered on a first come, first served basis, with the selection process streamlined for swift review and response.

VAPs will then work directly with OVS consultants to determine appropriate training needs, delivery methods and schedule. OVS consultants will help facilitate this process throughout the completion of each approved request.

More information about this program, including standard operating procedures and consultant biographies, is available [online](#). ■



## OVS Compensation Unit: Helpful Tips for NEW Victim Assistance Programs

The Compensation Unit wishes to welcome the new programs and advocates under our most recent RFA to OVS! There are numerous resources on the OVS website to assist you with filing claims so that they can be processed efficiently and effectively. On the OVS website ([www.ovs.ny.gov](http://www.ovs.ny.gov)) click on *Guidance for Victim Service Providers*, and then click on the *VAP Training Center*. This page contains a section titled “Advocate Guidelines for Compensation”. Under this section, the OVS Compensation Training Video Series can be accessed. These are excellent short videos that provide quick overviews of the different claim scenarios that OVS can help with.

The first document listed in this section is a telephone list of the Crime Victim Specialists and their respective supervisors. The remaining documents are handy guidelines regarding eligibility requirements for victims. Printing these documents and keeping them nearby may be helpful to you while working with your clients.

Further down on the *Guidance for Victim Services Providers* webpage, there is a section labeled “Victim Services Portal”. This section has links to many of the documents OVS requires when investigating a claim and making medical payments.

All programs are strongly encouraged to submit claim applications for their clients via the OVS Victim Services Portal (VSP). Instructions on how to register users of the Portal is the first document on this list. It is extremely important that users are correctly registered so that claims will be associated with your program. If users do not follow the instructions, it is likely they will inadvertently create a *personal* account and any claims entered under that account will not be credited to your program. It also means that other advocates in your program will not have access to those claims.

The VSP went live April 1, 2015. By the end of the first fiscal year, 50 percent of the claims that OVS received came through the Portal. By the end of the most recent fiscal year, 73 percent of all claims received have been entered through the portal. Claims that are received through the portal can be completed on an average of 12-25 days faster than paper applications submitted through the mail. We hope that you will use the portal as frequently as possible so that OVS can process victim claims more quickly. ■



## Meet the Legal Unit

The Legal Unit has some of the longest-tenured staff at OVS. Though currently the smallest staffed unit in the Office, the Legal Unit is involved in every aspect of OVS' operations. We thought it would benefit everybody to know what each member of the Legal Unit does, in order of seniority of service to OVS:

**Eamonn Trainor**, Senior Attorney, is the Legal Unit member with the longest tenure at OVS, at over 17 years. He is responsible for overseeing OVS' role in the state's Son of Sam law, which allows certain victims the opportunity to bring lawsuits against their perpetrators. In this role, he coordinates OVS' efforts with the New York State Attorney General's Office (AG) to freeze millions of dollars annually. Eamonn is also responsible for overseeing the Office's administrative appeal process – from intake to issuing the final determinations of the agency. To do so, he advises the senior-level staff on both the facts of a claim and the relevant law as they prepare for their review. He also coordinates with the AG to represent the agency when lawsuits are brought against us. Before his arrival to the Crime Victims Board (the predecessor of OVS), Eamonn worked in the Office of the San Diego District Attorney, and before that had a private law practice in Ireland.

**Bonnie Speanburg**, Legal Assistant II, came to OVS shortly after Eamonn and has over 17 years of service with OVS. She is primarily responsible for the day-to-day collection and tracking of restitution, subrogation and over payments for the Office. Through her efforts, OVS has consistently recouped over \$500,000 in such funding annually for the past several years. She also assists Counsel in making lien reduction/waiver determinations for claimants who request them. Prior to joining the agency, she was employed by the Governor's Office of Employee Relations/Labor Management Committees as the Disciplinary Panel Administrator.

**John Watson** is Agency Counsel with almost 13 years with the Office. He is responsible for overseeing and managing the work of the Legal Unit and providing legal counsel to the agency, from the Director and Executives, to all other staff. John drafts, negotiates and advocates for legislation and regulatory changes on behalf of the Office and drafts, negotiates and reviews many of the contracts and other agreements entered-into by OVS. He regularly consults with the Governor's Office on issues impacting the agency and crime victims, and is the agency's Public Information, Ethics, and Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) Officer. John's entire legal career has been in state service; before his appointment to the Crime Victims Board/OVS, he was Counsel to the Lieutenant Governor and to members of the State Senate.

**Shelby Foster**, Associate Attorney, has been with OVS for over 7 years. She is responsible for overseeing the work of our Secretary I and is the subject-matter expert on sexual assault, forensic rape exams (FREs), human trafficking, and domestic violence. Shelby provides trainings statewide to medical providers on FREs and to prosecutors on restitution. She represents the Office on inter-agency task-forces/groups related to human trafficking and college sexual assault prevention/response. Shelby is one of OVS senior-level staff who hear and determine administrative appeals. She also assists Counsel and the Director on many ad-hoc projects, assignments and meetings. Shelby began her state career before OVS with the Department of Financial Services, and before that provided legal counsel to a major financial and estate planning company.

**Amanda Ryan**, Secretary I, has been with the Office for over 15 months. Besides her valuable administrative support to the Legal Unit, Amanda processes all FRE direct-reimbursement claims submitted by medical providers, the volume of which exceeds 5,000 annually. OVS is Amanda's second state job. Before coming here she was with the Thruway Authority as the Inventory Management Office Assistant I. ■

## NY Crime Victims Legal Help Spotlight

After four years of planning, technology development, and user-testing, the Crime Victims Legal Network has rolled out its website, NY Crime Victims Legal Help, to all counties in our state outside of NYC!

Funded by the Office for Victims of Crime and founded by the NYS Office of Victim Services in collaboration with Empire Justice Center, Pro Bono Net, and the Center for Human Services Research, the Crime Victims Legal Network is partnership of organizations working to improve victims' access to information and civil legal resources through the use of technology. An Advisory Committee comprised of attorneys, victim advocates, and crime victims guided the Network's development, the culmination of which is NY Crime Victims Legal Help.



NY Crime Victims Legal Help ( [crimevictimshelpny.org/](http://crimevictimshelpny.org/) ) connects crime victims to information, self-help resources, and civil legal assistance to help them address issues that may arise as a result of their victimization. Currently, it's focused on the five major legal issues - housing, family, money, immigration and employment - identified in our needs assessment as areas of most concern for victims of crime. The legal content of the site has been written in plain language and aims to be empowering while recognizing the trauma of victimization.

In addition to the legal information found in the "Know Your Rights" section, the site features a Legal Help Directory which helps users identify organizations that may be able to help them based on their county of residence and legal issue. All Referral Partners - organizations that received June 2018 Attorney Services awards - appear first in the Legal Help Directory search results.

The online resource was launched as a pilot in late 2018 and gradually expanded to the 57 counties outside of NYC in 2019. Be prepared - the statewide rollout and subsequent publicity may result in more calls for assistance to OVS-funded crime victim advocates and referrals to your civil legal organization.

You can learn more information about the Crime Victims Legal Network and its planned expansion at the OVS Conference in November, or by contacting the project leader, Remla Parthasarathy, at [rparthasarathy@empirejustice.org](mailto:rparthasarathy@empirejustice.org). ■

## OVS Staff Attend 2019 SUNY Spectrum Conference

OVS staff attended and presented at the second annual [SPECTRUM Conference](#), held July 9-10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at the Albany Capital Center. The two-day conference on preventing sexual and interpersonal violence for sexual and gender minorities included more than 50 workshops and plenary sessions with expert speakers from around the country. ■

