

OVS Outreach

Spring 2022

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From the Director's Desk



April is always a busy month for advocates serving victims of crime. We observe Child Abuse Prevention Month, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). Throughout this month, we seek to honor

victims of crime, raise awareness about the issues, learn how to prevent victimization, feature resources for victims and survivors, and highlight the incredible work being done by service providers.

This year, NCVRW took place during the week of April 24-30. The theme *Rights, Access, and Equity for all Victims* brings into focus the obstacles that some victims of crime face. For some victims of crime barriers include knowing and securing their rights, limited access to person-centered services, and equitable treatment of all victims and survivors of crime. The voices of victims of crime from all walks of life are crucial to the conversation about their rights and needs.

In *Parallel Justice for Victims of Crime*, Susan Herman described how, just as there is a justice system for those who commit crimes, there must be parallel justice for those who have been harmed. It is critical that we provide a way for those we serve to feel safe, recover from trauma, and regain control of their lives. To do that, people need access to appropriate services, a clear understanding of their rights under the law, and fairness in the system.

Typically, there are events throughout New York for NCVRW, but the pandemic caused many communities to cancel their programs or hold them virtually over the last two years. This year, however, more events were scheduled (see [page 5](#)). As part of our desire to

Spring / Summer Training Opportunities

OVS is pleased to announce the following training opportunities for this spring and summer:

Clinical Trainings for licensed New York State Mental Health Providers and/or clinical program graduate students from OVS-funded organizations:

[Interpersonal Styles and Predictive Pathways in Therapy \(two-part series\)](#)

- May 11 & May 18: 10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

[Disaster Mental Health Fundamentals](#)

- June 22: 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
- In-person, SUNY New Paltz campus
- Registration opens Tuesday, May 17 at 9 a.m.

Victim Service Academy Trainings for OVS-funded advocates and allied professionals. Both cohorts will take place in-person on the SUNY New Paltz campus. Registration opens Tues., May 10 at 9 a.m.:

[Spring Cohort](#)

June 15-17

[Summer Cohort](#)

June 21-23

Please stay tuned to the OVS Training Listserv and [OVS VAP Connect](#) for more information about these and other upcoming training sessions offered by OVS. ■



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Victim Services

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From the Director's Desk

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raise awareness of services available to underserved communities, I visited two of our funded programs, [In Our Own Voices](#) in Albany and [The Center](#) (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center) in New York City, to honor their work with the LGBTQ+ community, particularly those who suffer from hate and violent crimes.

To see community awareness projects and events coordinated across the nation in celebration of the 2022 NCVRW, visit the U.S. Department of Justice's [Office for Victims of Crime](#). Governor Kathy Hochul issued [a NCVRW proclamation](#) and for the first time, [directed that state landmarks be illuminated blue, green and orange](#) – the colors designated for NCVRW – the evening of April 27 to recognize the importance of victims' rights and access to justice.



The Empire State Plaza illuminated for NCVRW.

As always, thank you for your continued commitment to providing the highest quality services to victims of crime across New York State.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Cronin, Esq.

State Budget Update

April marks the beginning of a new fiscal year and a new budget for New York State. OVS was closely watching the budget process in two critical areas this year: support for our upcoming Victim Assistance Program awards, and funding for our Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kit warehouse initiative.

We are pleased to report that the Fiscal Year 2023 Enacted Budget included an additional \$14.4 million in annual support for our next round of Victim Assistance Program awards. This funding will be provided through a transfer from the General Fund to the Criminal Justice Improvement Account. We intend to use the additional resources to bolster the amount available for awards under our current 2022 Request for Applications (RFA), which will increase the total from \$330 million to \$373 million over three years. This funding will be critical to supporting victim services organizations across the State.

The Enacted Budget also included \$2.5 million in operational funding for the evidence kit warehouse, as well as \$1.2 million in additional capital resources to continue the ongoing renovation of the facility. OVS has been working over the past year to develop the groundwork needed for the physical storage location, a tracking system to facilitate recordkeeping and victim notification, and a staffing plan to support this project. We look forward to providing additional updates and engagement opportunities for this project soon. ■

Compensation Claims: Sexual Assault

During 2021, OVS provided more than \$1.6 million in reimbursement to victims for losses suffered because of a sexual assault. This represents about 9 percent of total OVS compensation payments made during the year. Losses associated with sexual assault were almost evenly split among adult and child victims, with losses incurred by adult victims only marginally higher than children.

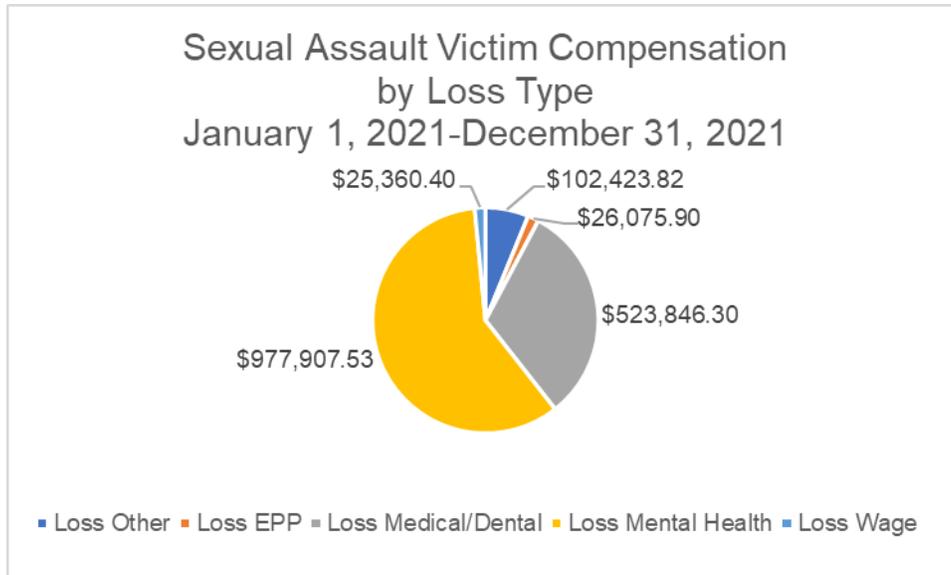


Figure 1. Sexual Assault Victim Compensation by Loss Type, 2021

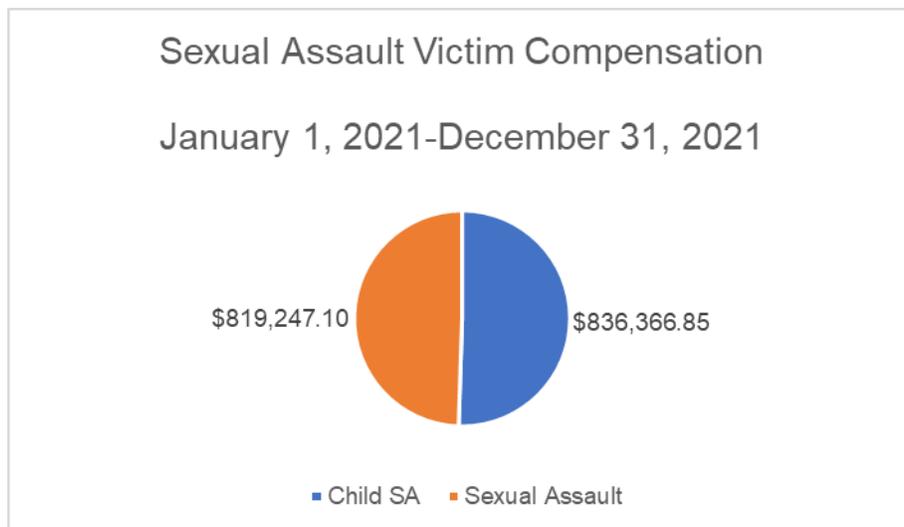


Figure 2. Sexual Assault Victim Compensation, 2021 ■

End Violence Against Women International Conference

By Elizabeth Cronin

I had the good fortune to attend the [End Violence Against Women International \(EVAWI\) Annual Conference](#) in San Francisco in April. In three jam-packed days, more than 1,900 in-person and virtual attendees heard from a wide array of professionals, experts and survivors on topics ranging from Alternative Responses to Intimate Partner Violence, DNA and Sexual Assault Kits as forensic tools, The Future of Victim Services, Secondary Trauma and Bystander Intervention, and Medical Response to Transgender Victims, to name just a few. The theme, Re-Imagining Justice, invited participants to think more creatively about ways to serve victims of sexual assault and domestic violence whether in the criminal justice system or through a victim advocacy lens.



Dyanie Bermeo tells her story at the EVAWI Annual Conference.

This truly is an international organization. There were representatives from as far away as Australia and South Africa, but the largest international delegation by far was from Ghana. All of the Ghanaian participants attended many of the events dressed in traditional clothing with beautiful bright blue, green and yellow fabrics with the names of their organizations on them. I was told that every year Ghana sends a large number of representatives and hopes to continue to do so.

The catch phrase at the conference was definitely “trauma-informed.” All the speakers emphasized how critical it is that everyone who works with or responds to victims be trauma aware and trained on how trauma affects recall, behavior, response, cooperation and recovery.

One of the most powerful presentations concerned a young college student from North Carolina who was travelling back to college in Tennessee one night. While crossing through Virginia, she was pulled over by a car flashing blue police lights. A man wearing a uniform demanded that she get out of the car and when she complied, the man sexually assaulted her. When she got back to school, she told a friend and ultimately reported to the sheriff’s department the next day. While they seemed to believe her initially, they did a extremely poor investigation and ended up charging the young woman with falsely reporting an incident! She was convicted of a misdemeanor at a bench trial, appealed and was ultimately acquitted. She fought for her rights as a victim and found the right advocates to assist her, including a skilled attorney and law professor specializing in these cases. During the ordeal she was branded a liar and worse on social media, fueled in part by the law enforcement agency posting her name, photograph and other information, while ignoring her actual status as a survivor of sexual assault.



Director Cronin (left) with Michelle Correo.

I also was thrilled to reconnect with Michelle Correo, a survivor from the Midwest who was a keynote speaker at our 2017 Conference. Her story is powerful, not only for what happened to her, but how the system responded to her victimization, from the hospital to law enforcement. She has such an important message: how we treat victims from the first moment we encounter them can make all the difference in their recovery and healing. Michelle has devoted her life to assisting victims of crime because of her experience and is so inspiring.

One of the best parts of the conference was being able to attend in-person to reconnect with old friends and make new ones. Attending conferences is not only critical for professional development, but also talking to colleagues about what they

are doing and whether those things can or should be implemented at home. I always come back with lots of ideas! ■

NCVRW—Bringing Awareness to Survivors of Crime

Spring means many different things to many different people – for those in the field of victim services, one notable feature of the season is the observance of NCVRW. This annual event is observed nationwide by agencies and professionals serving victims of crime to help bring awareness to the struggles of those impacted by criminal activity; to promote improvement of the experiences of victims of crime; and to find ways to reduce crime and victimization across the country. This year's NCVRW took place the week of April 24-30 and focused on highlighting the importance of accessible and inclusive services for those in need.

The observance of NCVRW began in 1981 when President Ronald Reagan established Crime Victims Week, which was expanded as Executive Order 12360 and established the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime. The observance of this week has been led by the federal Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) since 1988. Every year NCVRW adopts a different theme. This year's theme was "Rights, access, equity, for all victims."

OVC establishes these themes for victim service organizations across the country and also provides guidance and resources for program participation. Every year a themed color palette is announced for programs to identify their NCVRW materials and demonstrate their commitment to the theme. This year's palette consists of shades of blue, green, and orange, and promotional materials include a downloadable promotional poster that can be customized with a program's information.

OVC also awards programs that excel in a variety of categories, such as leadership, building trust and engaging communities. Programs can apply for funding from OVC for events tied to NCVRW, receiving up to \$5,000 to support public awareness events promoting the message.

Victim services programs across the nation participated, and those funded by OVS are no exception! A wide variety of different events occurred around the state: St. Peter's annual Strides for Survivors 5K (formerly Walk a Mile in Her Shoes), that allowed people from all over the region run, walk, and roll to raise awareness and show support for victims of sexual assault. A sea of people wearing pink moving together is quite the sight! The Rensselaer County District Attorney's Office held their DWI Victims Memorial Ceremony to coincide with the observance of NCVRW, and the Downstate Coalition hosted its moving and powerful Candlelight Vigil.

Albany County Crime Victim & Sexual Violence Center was among many hosting virtual events this year: a Take Back the Night event and Sounds of Strength for Survivors Awareness Concert raised funds for sexual assault and domestic violence prevention efforts. Mothers Against Drunk Driving hosted a virtual candlelight vigil for victims and survivors, electing to align their event with the spirit and themes of this year's NCVRW, and the Orange County Crime Victims Vigil was held virtually.

In person or virtual, this year's NCVRW featured all sorts of events honoring victims and highlighting the important work of the programs we serve, as well as countless others across the country. ■

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