



Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistance

Newsletter

WINTER 2025

In 2025, VIVA will continue to build upon the foundation it has been building since its creation in September 2022.



Message from
NJ Attorney General
MATTHEW J. PLATKIN

I established the Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistance –VIVA –to help further New Jersey’s commitment to establishing a unified structure for providing services to victims of violence, responding to violence in New Jersey’s communities, and disrupting the cycles of violence to prevent it from happening in the first place. Built on the foundation already in place under the leadership of Governor Murphy, with the support of the Legislature, and under the leadership of Executive Director Patricia Teffenhart and her dedicated team, we are realizing those goals.

By providing resources and support to the local agencies and non-profit organizations best suited to support their communities, as well as through VIVA’s commitment to survivor-centered, trauma-informed policy and practice reform, we are transforming the public safety infrastructure in New Jersey.

In just a short time, VIVA has changed the landscape, amplifying restorative justice perspectives and establishing a statewide continuum of services that operates alongside traditional service providers, including law enforcement, helping us create a safer New Jersey.



A Word from
VIVA Executive Director
PATRICIA TEFFENHART

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Serving as the inaugural Executive Director of the Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistant (VIVA) is an incredible honor. Over the last two years, we’ve built a team comprised of professionals with diverse skills and backgrounds, but with a shared commitment to establishing more expansive pathways to justice and healing. And, with the [codification of VIVA into state statute](#), we are here to stay!

This publication is a place for us to share our work with you – our valued stakeholders. We know that our goals cannot be accomplished without you. Whether you’re answering a 24-hour hotline, supporting survivors in the emergency room, providing counseling services, holding peace walks, or helping individuals navigate the criminal legal system, YOUR WORK MATTERS, and we are proud to be in community with all of you.

We look forward to the days ahead. Thank you for your partnership.

In community,

Meet the Team

PATRICIA TEFFENHART
Executive Director

KELLY RODENBAUGH
Deputy Executive Director

MARY ELLEN BONSPER
Director
Victims of Crime
Compensation Office

STEVEN CAMPOS
Director
Office of Violence
Intervention and Prevention

ERIN SNYDER
Director
Office of Victim Support
and Assistance

KARA WEBSTER
Director
Office of Trial and Criminal
Justice Process

ROBERT HAYES II
Grant Manager

ELIZABETH LAWRENCE
Victim Services Trauma
and Resiliency Officer

SIOBHÁN MICHAUD
Administrative Assistant

REBECCA RAMOS
Community
Engagement Manager

In Review

VIVA is dedicated to supporting the Department of Law and Public Safety's commitment to creating systemic, statewide approaches to combating violent crime and disrupting cycles of violence. The following are examples of just some of the meaningful initiatives and milestones celebrated since VIVA's creation.

■ ***Attorney General Platkin and VIVA partner with the NJ Office of the Public Defender to Launch Community Education Initiative on Restorative Justice***

The initiative is part of an effort to increase the public's understanding of restorative justice and develop strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the approach. [Read more...](#)

■ ***Amended Statewide Directive Requiring All Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Kits Turned Over to Law Enforcement Be Tested***

The Directive removes prosecutorial discretion and establishes statewide procedures and guidelines for tracking, storing, and submitting specimens for testing. [Read more...](#)

■ ***Governor Murphy and AG Platkin Announced \$100 Million Funding Milestone for the Administration's Support of Violence Intervention Programming***

Since 2019, New Jersey has invested state and federal funds into Community-Based Violence Intervention programs, Hospital-Based Violence Intervention programs, and Trauma Recovery Centers to end cycles of violence. [Read more...](#)

■ ***AG Platkin Announced the Receipt of \$2 Million in Competitive Federal Funding to Offer Survivors of Sexual Assault a Way to Track the Progress of Their Case***

The advanced tracking system for the state's Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) kits is part of an ongoing commitment to provide victims of sexual assault with support and transparency in the aftermath of victimization. [Read more...](#)

■ ***Statewide Directive Establishing Multidisciplinary Response to Strangulation and Smothering***

The Directive creates the framework for a response team known as the "Breathing/Blood Flow Restriction Event: Advocacy, Treatment, Help, and Empowerment" or BREATHE Team. [Read more...](#)



2024 National Crime Victims' Rights Week

In recognition of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, on April 26, the Department hosted its annual event, coordinated by VIVA, to honor victims of crime and the individuals and organizations that work to support them. The national theme—How Would You Help?—encouraged friends, family members, and communities to consider the ways they can support crime victims. The event showcased the innovative and survivor-centered practices and policies emerging in the field and implemented by the Department, and highlighted the role of the Victims of Crime Compensation Office (VCCO) in supporting survivors of crime. As part of the event, Attorney General Platkin acknowledged the ongoing work of victim advocates, service providers, and law enforcement professionals by presenting five honorees with the 2024 OAG Excellence Awards for Victims' Justice.

The following is a list of the award recipients who were nominated by their colleagues and selected by the Department's Crime Victims' Rights Week Committee:

Crime Victims' Rights Award

VIDALIA ACEVEDO

Domestic Violence Advocate - Women's Rights Information Center

Gladiator Award

THERESA L. HILTON

Director - Division of Criminal Justice - NJ Department of Law and Public Safety

Ronald Reagan Award

TONI PRETLOW

Trauma Outreach Specialist - Capital Health

VIVA's Above and Beyond Award

SEAN THOM

Founder and Executive Director - Our Future First

Endurance Award

PATRICIA HAYEK

Director of Victim Services - Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office

2024 New Jersey Attorney General's Symposium Series

In April 2024, VIVA, in collaboration with the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), launched the New Jersey Attorney General's Symposium Series, creating an opportunity for colleagues across a range of intersecting disciplines to engage in substantive discourse and training on issues relating to victims and survivors of violence and crime. The half-day, in-person convenings featured engaging agendas intended to highlight recent updates to policies and procedures; briefings on new, emerging, and promising practices from the field; data spotlights; and time-sensitive topics.

April 18, 2024: Sexual Violence

In recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the first session of the newly created series was held in April, where over 200 professionals and colleagues from a range of intersecting disciplines gathered to discuss current issues and trends related to sexual violence. The symposium featured important policy updates about Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) kits, including [Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive No. 2024-02](#), which expanded the standard Sexual Assault Response Team activation period from five days to seven days from when the incident is reported to have occurred. Presentations also included Circles & Courtrooms: Reimagining Pathways to Justice and Healing, facilitated by representatives from VIVA and the Office of the Public Defender, that introduced the practice of restorative justice as an option for survivors of sexual violence to seek accountability outside of the traditional criminal justice system. Additionally, Forensic Nurse Examiners from Middlesex and Ocean counties presented on individual case studies to illustrate the specialized medical care victims receive in the immediate aftermath of sexual trauma.



June 17, 2024: Gun and Community Violence Prevention

As part of the Department's collective efforts to raise awareness during Gun Violence Awareness Month, VIVA, DCJ, and OAG hosted the second session of the series in June, where over 150 prosecutors, law enforcement professionals, advocates, and community partners discussed issues around gun violence and exchanged ideas about effective and innovative strategies to prevent community-based violence in New Jersey. The symposium featured panel discussions facilitated by VIVA's Office of Violence Intervention and Prevention (OVIP), and included professionals and advocates from community-based violence intervention programs funded by the Department. Topics included current trends and best practices used by New Jersey's hospital-based violence intervention programs and the importance of centering people with lived experience as part of community change. The symposium also highlighted the work of Prosecutor LaChia Bradshaw of Burlington, and the successes of the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office's Anti-Gun Violence Initiative.

October 23, 2024: Domestic Violence

In October, as part of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, VIVA, DCJ, and OAG hosted the third symposium of the year, where over 175 law enforcement professionals, forensic nurse examiners, advocates, and other stakeholders gathered to hear from colleagues and experts from the field of domestic violence intervention and prevention. The event included a multidisciplinary panel of representatives from the BREATHE (Breathing/Blood Flow Restriction Event Advocacy, Treatment, Help and Empowerment) Team, who discussed their roles and shared current trends in the response to non-fatal strangulation and smothering. Also highlighted was the ongoing work of the Department, including the compensation available to some survivors of domestic violence from the Victims of Crime Compensation Office (VCCO) and an analysis from DCJ regarding the rules of evidence when prosecuting domestic violence offenses.



Audience members also heard from Dr. Michelle Patch of Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, who shared information about the ongoing Preventing and Assessing Intimate Partner Homicide Risk (PAIR) Study and the growing research around risk factors associated with intimate partner homicide.



2024 VOCA National Joint Training Conference

In August, VIVA hosted workshops at the National Conference for Victim Assistance Compensation Administrators in New Orleans to share the impact of the Department's investment in New Jersey's community-based violence intervention programs and the innovative strategies used to increase access to compensation for victims of crime across the state. Attended by administrators from around the country, Executive Director Patricia Teffenhart co-facilitated a workshop entitled, "Improving Responses to Community and Gun Violence: Understanding what We Know to Inform Where We Go", where she discussed VIVA's approach to supporting innovative responses to victims of crime in New Jersey and shared how agencies can implement accessible resource allocation practices in their own states. Deputy Director Claribel Bautista of the Victims of Crime Compensation Office and VIVA's Community Engagement Manager, Rebecca Ramos, also presented at the conference. In a workshop called "Developing a Strategic Outreach Plan: How New Jersey Uses Data to Increase Access to Underserved Populations", they shared VCCO's approach to creating a strategic outreach and engagement plan by using organizational and publicly available data to effectively increase awareness about benefits available to victims of crime in New Jersey.

2024 National Offices of Violence Prevention Network Convening

In September, OVIP Director Steven Campos spoke at the 3rd annual National Offices of Violence Prevention Network (NOVPN) Convening in Los Angeles and discussed the impact of VIVA and OVIP throughout New Jersey. Alongside Caliana Thomas, Director of the New York State Office of Gun Violence Prevention, Director Campos talked about OVIP's structure, the community-based organizations and programs funded by the Office, and the Office's mission of building up violence prevention programming as a strong component in New Jersey's public safety ecosystem.



VIVA at the White House

On September 26, Executive Director Teffenhart—alongside survivors, advocates, and community violence intervention leaders— was invited to attend a White House event where President Biden signed an executive order aimed at mitigating the trauma caused to children by active shooter drills in schools and addressing the threat of machine gun conversion devices. The executive order established a task force that assessed the risks associated with unserialized, 3D-printed firearms and conversion devices. Additionally, the order directed the surgeon general and secretaries of the Education and Health and Human Services departments to develop guidance for schools on conducting active shooter drills that minimize trauma for students.

Executive Director Teffenhart pictured with community-based violence intervention partners from Newark Community Street Team.

Office of Violence Intervention and Prevention (OVIP)

STEVEN CAMPOS

Director, Office of Violence Intervention and Prevention

VIVA's Office of Violence Intervention and Prevention (OVIP) manages and supports the Department's community violence intervention and prevention investments.

Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention (CBVI) work combines both an understanding of risk factors for exposure to violence and implementation of protective activities. The NJ CBVI Program supports non-profit community service providers in the development and implementation of violence intervention and prevention programming for communities impacted by higher-than-average rates of violence, with a focus on gun violence. CBVI programs work with groups and individuals to build their capacity to seek healthy methods for addressing and resolving conflict.

New Jersey's Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs (NJHVIP) connect victims of community violence to services beginning at the hospital bedside, offering comprehensive support that provides the healing and stability needed to reduce the risk of retaliation or revictimization. NJHVIPs' teams of medical and community service providers come together in the immediate aftermath of a violent incident to ensure that victims leave the hospital engaged in services and with the support needed to continue healing.

Trauma Recovery Centers (TRCs) provide support, care, and healing to survivors of violence. TRCs offer an important healing component in the continuum of care, offering a range of services that include mental health services, holistic healing, support groups, case management, and referrals to community resources.

Since 2019, New Jersey has invested over \$100 million in state and federal dollars to violence prevention and intervention programming.

Three Regional Conversations

In November, OVIP hosted three regional virtual meetings with service providers, community members, and stakeholders for conversations about the impact of community violence intervention programs in New Jersey. The purpose of the meetings was to receive feedback from members of the public and grant recipients about community violence intervention programs, including how funds are spent, the effectiveness of programs, best practices, and whether programs and initiatives were accomplishing their missions. The meetings, attended by over 100 individuals, featured an overview of VIVA and OVIP, data about community violence intervention programs in their region, and an opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback to help VIVA and OVIP inform future efforts to prevent gun and community violence.

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Victims of Crime Compensation Office (VCCO)

MARY ELLEN BONSPER, *Director*

In recent years, New Jersey made several changes to its governing statutes and regulations that increased accessibility of services and claims for victims. These changes have increased the vital aid provided to victims and their families through the VCCO, particularly for victims of domestic violence. For example, in FY24, 64% of the claims supported domestic violence victims to assist with legal fees in order to obtain protective orders, child custody and support issues, and other related matters; provide relocation assistance necessary to keep such victims safe; and award loss of support where the offender is no longer living in the household, and has ceased making support payments, or is incarcerated due to the crime. In FY24, the VCCO awarded \$22.2 million in claim payments— an increase of nearly \$10.1 million from FY20 and the highest amount to date.

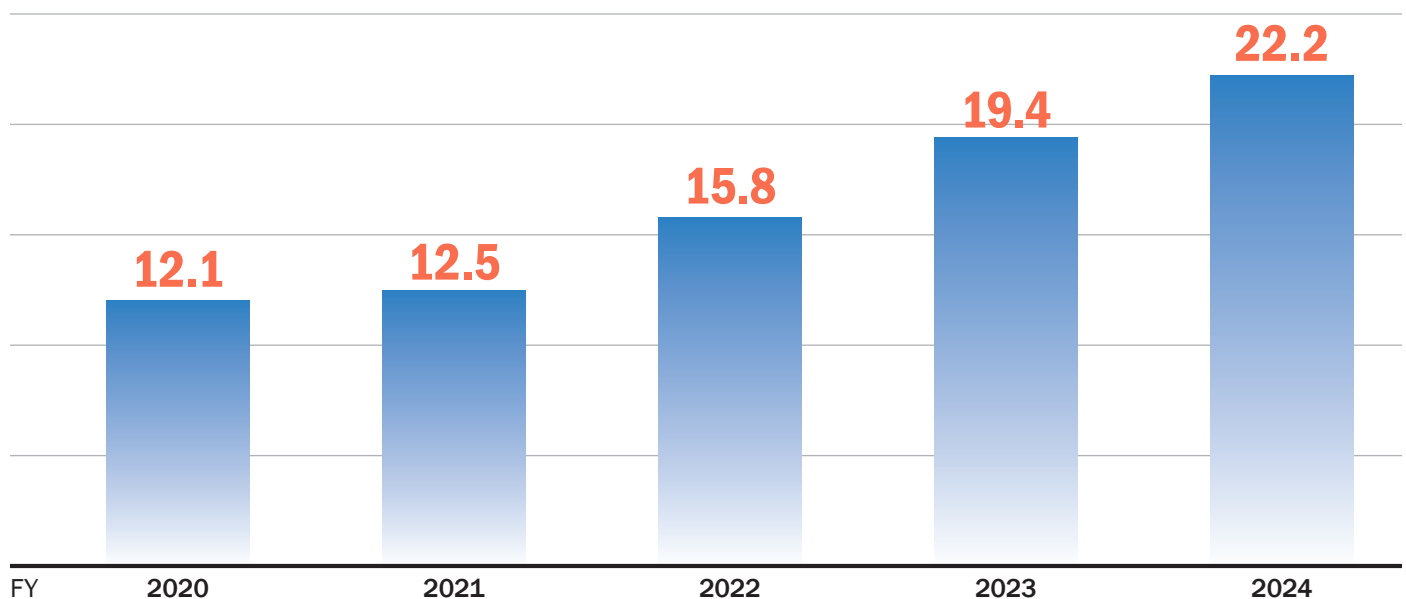
In March, VCCO hosted its first quarterly informational webinar to increase our stakeholders' understanding of VCCO benefits. These live 1-hour webinars provide ongoing opportunities to share information and answer questions from key stakeholders in support of our shared commitment to supporting victims/survivors of crime. Dates and registration information for upcoming webinars can be found below.

Click on the dates below to register and join us in 2025!

- Tuesday, [March 18, 2025](#) at 10:00am
- Wednesday, [June 25, 2025](#) at 10:00am
- Thursday, [September 25, 2025](#) at 10:00am
- Monday, [December 15, 2025](#) at 10:00am

An abridged recording of the webinar and other information about eligibility requirements can be found on the VCCO [website here](#).

Total Amount in Claims Awarded since FY 2020



Office of Trial and Criminal Justice Process (OTCJP)

KARA WEBSTER

Director, Office of Trial and Criminal Justice Process

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men experience stalking in their lifetimes. Studies indicate that 80% of all stalking victims are tracked using technology, while 67% are stalked in person, and some people experience both types of stalking. In December 2023, Governor Murphy signed the Victim's Assistance and Survivor Protection Act (VASPA)—a major step in creating a more victim-centered Garden State. Through the VASPA, victims of stalking and cyber harassment will now be able to seek civil protective orders against their offenders, a much-needed relief to ensure their physical and emotional safety.

A VASPA protective order can provide protection for victims who experience nonconsensual sexual contact or sexual penetration, lewdness, stalking, and cyber harassment, by prohibiting a defendant from committing these acts again and can prohibit the defendant from contacting the victim, or provide other relief the Court deems appropriate. VASPA empowers survivors in New Jersey with a crucial tool to proactively seek protection against those seeking to cause harm. As part of its role in helping survivors

navigate the criminal justice system, OTCJP developed a [fact sheet](#) that provides an overview of the statute and additional information about resources and support.

Sexual Violence Restorative Justice Pilot Program

In April 2024, OTCJP and the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) launched an educational initiative to lay the foundation for New Jersey's Sexual Violence Restorative Justice Pilot Program. As part of the initiative, VIVA and OPD hosted four educational workshops attended by nearly 100 multidisciplinary stakeholders, where panelists discussed the history and principles of restorative justice; the legislation that created the Sexual Violence Restorative Justice Pilot Program in New Jersey; common misperceptions and potential legal concerns; and the victim's role in defining and seeking justice in a restorative justice process.

As we continue our efforts toward the pilot's development, we invite you to take this brief [3-minute survey](#) to gauge your understanding of, and attitudes towards, restorative justice. The survey is anonymous and voluntary; we hope to hear your voice!

Office of Victim Support and Assistance (OVSA)

ERIN SNYDER, *Director, Office of Victim Support and Assistance*

OVSA is committed to helping service providers and community organizations develop policies and practices that reduce the effects of vicarious and secondary trauma and build resilience among those who work with victims of crime. Creating a sustainable model that promotes resilience and protects professionals is key to providing effective advocacy and services to those impacted by crime. At this year's Crime Victims' Rights Week event, OVSA provided a 1-hour workshop that discussed the impact of working with survivors of violence and how vicarious and secondary trauma affects lives of individuals professionally and personally. Facilitators also discussed how organizational policies can transform and empower not just staff, but the survivors they serve. By adopting trauma informed principles and practices, organizations can maintain a long-term culture of empowerment, resilience, and healing for survivors and the professionals who support them.

Looking Ahead

MARCH

March 18, 2025:

Victims of Crime Compensation Office Informational Webinar

This 1-hour webinar will provide an overview of the VCCO and the eligibility requirements for victims and their families to receive compensation for costs accrued as a result of a crime. Attendees can register [here](#).

APRIL

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) calls attention to the fact that sexual violence is widespread and impacts every person in the community. SAAM aims to raise public awareness about sexual violence and educate communities on how to prevent it.

Child Abuse Prevention Month

Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) Month is a time when child wellness and child welfare organizations across the state elevate the importance of creating systems and programs that put children and families first. Throughout the month, advocates and families use pinwheels as a symbol of support and the bright future children deserve.

April 8, 2025: Wear Teal Day

The first Tuesday of every April is the SAAM Day of Action. The Day of Action is an opportunity to start off the month with highly visible and coordinated actions. Show your support for survivors of sexual harassment and abuse by wearing teal. By wearing teal, you're signaling that you support survivors, and are a safe person to talk to if they need to reach out.

April 6-12, 2025:

National Crime Victims' Rights Week

National Crime Victims' Rights Week is an opportunity to honor survivors of crime, learn about the effects of victimization on individuals, families, friends and the community, and to promote practices, policies, and programs to help victims of crime. Each year, communities across New Jersey honor the dedication of those before us and renew our shared commitment to guarantee that all victims have the rights and services they need to recover from crime.

April 10, 2025:

Crime Victims' Rights Week Ceremony

Each year, the Department of Law and Public Safety recognizes individuals, teams, programs, and organizations that demonstrate outstanding service in supporting victims and victims services in New Jersey. Each award reflects this year's theme, "Connecting < KINSHIP > Healing", which is a call-to-action to recognize that shared humanity should be at the center of supporting all survivors and victims of crime. KINSHIP is a state of being with survivors that drives vital connections and increases access to services, rights, and healing. This year's event will include networking, information tables, informative presentations and panel discussions, and the annual awards ceremony. To register for the event, reserve an exhibit table, and to submit award nominations, visit www.njoag.gov/cvrw



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