

# CALIFORNIA VICTIMS

# AGENDA



A TEN-POINT  
PLAN TO ADDRESS  
THE NEEDS OF  
CALIFORNIA'S  
DIVERSE VICTIMS  
OF CRIME



CRIME SURVIVORS FOR  
SAFETY AND JUSTICE



CALIFORNIANS  
FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE

# CALIFORNIA VICTIMS AGENDA

## Addressing the needs of California's diverse victims of crime

Despite substantial increases in criminal justice expenditures over the past three decades, the majority of crime survivors do not receive support to help them recover from harm. State spending on victim services represents about 1 percent of what the state spends on the prison system. In other words, California spends nearly 80 times more on prisons than on services for crime victims.

As efforts to reform the criminal justice system grow statewide, it has never been more important to envision approaches to safety and justice that reach all victims and meet the safety needs of those communities most harmed and least helped.

Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice represents 10,000 survivors from across California and regularly surveys representative groups of survivors to understand most crime survivors' needs and policy preferences. The California Victims Agenda outlines the top priorities of California survivors to better meet our urgent and unmet recovery and protection needs.

The California Victims Agenda is a ten point plan to:

**EXPAND RIGHTS + END DISCRIMINATION + PROVIDE REAL HELP**

## EXPAND RIGHTS

### **INCREASE LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR VICTIMS TO PREVENT JOB AND HOUSING LOSS**

1

There are some legal protections that prevent victims from losing housing or employment, but these protections must be expanded to ensure that all victims have the rights to maintain stable employment and housing while recovering from crime. Currently, only large employers provide victims in need of recovery time unpaid protected leave, but this must extend to all employees who become victims of crime, regardless of where they work. Victims' rights to maintain housing after becoming a victim of crime must be guaranteed also, including permission to delay housing or rental payments if a financial crisis emerges after victimization, and authority to immediately change locks for protection. Similarly, surviving family members of homicide victims should be afforded the same rights to leave time for burial arrangements, grieving, and recovery without losing work or housing.

### **EXPAND VICTIMS' CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES TO HELP ALL VICTIMS RECOVER**

2

Civil legal services programs provide pivotal support to victims of crime for everything from tenant and worker protections to immigration issues to family law assistance. Yet, too few victims are aware of these legal services or gain access to them. The establishment of victims' legal services must be required, in order to reach all victims in need of legal assistance, as well as widespread public education to ensure that victims are aware of—and can access—these services in their communities and in culturally and linguistically appropriate settings.

### **ENSURE DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF UNSOLVED CRIMES**

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The majority of crime goes unsolved. Too often, the only survivors that attain information or help from the justice system are those for whom an arrest or prosecution is underway or has occurred. Victims and surviving family members of unsolved crimes can suffer extreme stress and chronic trauma arising in part from not having information or knowing what happened. These survivors have rights, too. Real justice should ensure dignity and support for all victims of crime. Justice system officials must ensure responsibility to these survivors, treat them with respect, and ensure that they are connected to recovery services and support.

## END DISCRIMINATION

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### **EXPAND VICTIM SERVICES' ELIGIBILITY TO ALL VICTIMS OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE**

Exclusions and barriers to access to victim services shut out millions of people harmed by violent crime. While there are important benefits and protections for victims, such as victim compensation, victim services, and some protections against eviction or job loss arising from victimization, those benefits and protections are not readily available to all crime survivors. California must end discriminatory rules or practices that treat victims differently depending on status or demographics. Expanding eligibility to services and compensation to all victims and explicitly affirming protections to all victims is crucial to supporting healing and stopping trauma cycles. This includes ending exclusions that blame victims for their own victimization and prevent eligibility, and extending eligibility for benefits and protections to witnesses to violence, family members of violence victims, people with prior records or on probation or parole, and victims of police violence. Eligibility should also not require police reports when other types of reliable documentation are available.

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### **ERADICATE RACIAL DISPARITIES IN ACCESS TO COMPENSATION AND SERVICES**

While all walks of life are impacted by crime and violence, their impact is also concentrated and unequal. Young people, people of color, and low-income people are most likely to experience repeat victimization and less likely to attain support and services to recover from harm. Services are not universally available, and eligibility restrictions have been reported to result in disproportionate denials of compensation or services to victims of color. Victims of color also report experiencing significant difficulty actually attaining access to recovery services, whether a benefits application was approved or not. California must track and publish data by race and other key demographics on denial or approval rates of compensation applications and victim access to services, and immediately address disparities in application approvals or access to services to ensure equal access to help.

## PROVIDE REAL HELP

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### REACH MORE SURVIVORS IN CRISIS—AND FASTER

The majority of crime survivors have never heard of the California Victim Compensation Program or other benefits programs designed to help survivors stabilize. California must expand outreach programs and ensure that those programs are available in multiple languages, through multiple platforms, and are delivered in all the places underserved survivors frequent. Everyone who works with victims of crime on a daily basis, including law enforcement, service providers, and health professionals, must be trained to understand the civil legal protections that exist, how to access help, and how to ensure that victims can access help. Once aware of available benefits, many survivors still report being unable to access them because the response time to urgent needs is too slow. Bureaucratic processes and protocols can mean that people don't get help when they need it. Emergency financial support must be available as broadly as possible and must be processed quickly so people can get timely help, and non-emergency applications for help must be resolved within a reasonable amount of time.

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### COVER ACTUAL COSTS OF RECOVERY

Aid designated to help victims with recovery and/or bereavement must be meaningful enough to cover the actual costs that victims incur. Policymakers should increase benefits to match actual costs, and cover a diverse range of healing, treatment, and support services that meet the recovery needs of a wide range of victims. Policymakers should also ensure that benefits fully cover burial expenses and funerals and expand outreach for this benefit.

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### ENSURE THAT TRAUMA RECOVERY SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE

The vast majority of survivors of violence, especially repeat violence, experience one or more symptoms of trauma. Unaddressed trauma can cause a lifetime of debilitating outcomes for people's physical health, mental health, and economic stability. The solutions exist—but they are not supported at scale to reach and support the number of people in need. Model trauma recovery programs that provide wraparound case management and mental health supports as well as peer-to-peer support can help survivors heal. California must expand its Trauma Recovery Centers to reach all of California's communities and expand trauma support programs in schools to reach children and youth traumatized by violence. Providing survivors with a real right to recover from trauma should be a fundamental goal of our public safety systems.

## INVEST IN COMMUNITY-BASED VICTIM SERVICES PROVIDERS

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Culturally competent community-serving programs rooted in neighborhoods that experience concentrated violence and crime must be supported with multi-year flexible funding and sufficient resources to meet the need, and must be scaled up across the state. Public agencies that distribute victim services funds must prioritize community-based organizations. Specialized Requests-for-Proposal should be expanded to increase funding opportunities for these organizations, and resource sharing between established providers and newer organizations should be encouraged. The application processes to disperse funds to community-based organizations and reimbursement processes governing how these organizations are funded must become user friendly. It should be the mission of every government agency that works with victims to eliminate barriers to resources reaching the organizations with the most community credibility and connection.

## FUND URGENT CRISIS ASSISTANCE NEEDS—NOW

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In the crisis of a global pandemic, many people are in acute crisis and less support is available. Homicide and violence rates have increased, a predictable outcome of large-scale occurrences of job loss, school closures, food and housing insecurity, and loss of life arising from the virus. At the same time, frontline crisis assistance service providers are either closed or operating with limited capacity. California must immediately provide substantially increased investments to frontline service providers to help quell the violence and get survivors the crisis assistance support they need. We urge allocation of large-scale augmented general fund dollars to the Victims Compensation program and the Violence Intervention and Prevention grant program, as well as flexible, general support dollars to community-based crisis assistance providers that can help provide survivors and communities immediate cash assistance to meet basic needs. The state should also improve the way it leverages federal grants like the Victims of Crime Act assistance grants to ensure funding is available to community-based organizations providing critical services. Specifically, we urge, at a minimum, increasing the Cal VIIP grant program by at least \$115 million, authorizing flexible emergency use of these dollars by frontline service providers, and providing at least \$115 million in general funds to the California Victim Compensation Board, to permanently stabilize victim compensation funding and end CalVCB's reliance on fines and fees.

**Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice California** is a network of 10,000 crime survivors who have joined together to create healing communities and shape public safety policy. We are a flagship project of the Alliance for Safety and Justice.



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