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Supporting victims' rights

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April 13-19 is National Crime Victims' Rights Week — a time for all Americans to learn about victimization, reflect on the cost of crime to our society, and promote laws, policies, and programs to help victims of crime rebuild their lives.

The week's theme, "Justice for Victims. Justice for All," envisions a strengthened national commitment to the nearly 23 million Americans harmed by crime each year. During the past three decades, the United States has made dramatic progress in securing rights, protections, and services for victims of crime. Every state has enacted victims' rights laws; law enforcement agencies give victims greater protection; and more than 10,000 victim's assistance programs have been established throughout the country.

Every state has a crime victim compensation fund, and powerful federal laws, such as the Violence Against Women Act and the Crime Victims' Rights Act, to help protect victims and fund needed services. Alabama's own Attorney General Troy King has worked hard to pass laws to protect our children from sexual predators and numerous other crime bills. Despite these advances, victims still face significant hurdles to attaining real justice.

Victims are often not treated with respect by prosecutors and judges; they are not notified about key deliberations in their criminal cases; they fail to access the victim compensation to which they are entitled; and they continue to struggle without services that will help them recover from the trauma of crime.

National Crime Victims' Rights Week challenges us to ask what justice means to victims and how we can move closer to achieving the ideal of justice for all. What justice means to victims is both complex and varied, but most victims of crime express the same priorities. They want to be safe and made whole.

They want their physical and emotional wounds healed and their property restored. They want offenders held accountable for their crimes, and they want to take part in the process that holds them responsible.

They want their communities to stand respectfully behind them as they strive to rebuild their lives. VOCAL and Wiregrass Angel House will launch National Crime Victims' Rights Week in Dothan at the First Presbyterian Church, U.S. 84 West, on Sunday, April 13 at 3 p.m. with its 11th annual Candlelight Observance Ceremony. Alabama Attorney General Troy King will be our guest speaker. Please join us and let victims know that you care.

Pat Jones
Dothan
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