



NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK NEW CHALLENGES, NEW SOLUTIONS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING MARKS A NATURAL period of new beginnings as winter's cold gives way to warmer weather, brighter days and budding bluebonnets along Texas highways. For law enforcement and others who are dedicated to serving and protecting victims of crime, spring also marks an annual opportunity to observe National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). This year, NCVRW's theme, "New Challenges – New Solutions," reflects victim advocates' increasingly complex mission to reach and serve each and every victim of crime.

In Texas, crime victim advocates and law enforcement agencies across the state demonstrate that collaboration offers the best pathway to success. By working together, we can develop bold solutions to emerging challenges and provide seamless support for crime victims. For proof of the value of a collaborative response in the face of a tragically difficult challenge, just consider the terrible shooting that perpetuated College Station just before fall classes began at Texas A&M University.

In August 2012, Brazos County Constable Brian Bachmann arrived at a College Station residence to serve an eviction notice to its occupant. Before the constable reached the front door, the occupant brandished a weapon, stepped outside the house and met the constable with deadly gunfire. After a deadly half-hour confrontation with local law enforcement, Constable Bachmann and an innocent bystander were dead – as was the perpetrator who occupied the residence. Three officers with the College Station Police Department and a female bystander were also wounded during the murderous perpetrator's senseless act of criminal violence.

As soon as we heard about the tragic events in College Station, the Attorney General's Office swung into action in an effort to help College Station respond in the aftermath of the terrible shooting. Some police officers with our Law Enforcement Division immediately contacted local authorities to offer law enforcement and investigative assistance.

Staff with our Crime Victim Services Division (CVSD) also reached out to the Aggieland community, traveling to College Station to work with the College Station Police Department to aid those who were affected by the terrible crime. Thanks in part to our proactive outreach, we subsequently received six applications for financial assistance from the Texas Compensation to Victims of Crime Fund (Fund), which is administered by the Attorney General's Office. The Fund is available to help eligible victims offset financial costs they incur because of violent crime.

Three of the applications we received were submitted on behalf of the police officers who were injured during the shooting. Under state law, when a peace officer is injured or killed in the line of duty, the officer or their surviving family members may apply for certain benefits such as lost wages – which includes income that would have been earned from off-duty employment, medical bills, counseling and burial expenses.

All six of the applications were promptly reviewed and approved so that the victims did not suffer further from the tragic shooting. And though financial assistance may be relatively inconsequential when tragedy strikes, we wanted to move as quickly as possible to do everything in our power to deliver whatever help we were able to provide.

The multitude of law enforcement officers and bystanders affected by the murderous crime in College Station last fall presented a difficult challenge for CVSD and crime victim advocates. But all parties recognized the difficulty of their job was miniscule compared to the life-altering consequences faced by the victims. The Attorney General's Office is honored to collaborate with dedicated crime victim advocates and law enforcement authorities statewide to make our communities stronger and transform victim services in the 21st century. Together, we can find bold, new solutions to new challenges.

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