



October 1, 2018 - 11:45am

New York Crime Victims Legal Help being piloted in Erie, Genesee and Niagara counties

New York State Office of Victim Services partners with nonprofits to create the new resource

The New York State Office of Victim Services today announced a new website connecting crime victims with information and free civil legal assistance is being piloted in three Western New York counties, allowing victims to learn about their rights and connect with resources or legal representation. Established using \$1.5 million in federal funds secured by the state agency, the [New York Crime Victims Legal Help](#) website will initially serve Erie, Genesee and Niagara counties and will expand to serve crime victims Upstate and on Long Island by the end of 2019.

“Too often, we see crime victims struggling to pull their lives together in the months and even years after they’ve been victimized,” **Office of Victim Services Director Elizabeth Cronin said.** “Many times, they are unsure of the assistance they need or unaware of the legal resources that are available. This website will be a beacon for these individuals – a place where they can easily learn about their rights as a crime victim and locate critical legal resources to help them navigate civil matters.”

The Office of Victim Services partnered with the Empire Justice Center, Pro Bono Net and the University at Albany's Center for Human Services Research to create the website, which will assist crime victims outside of New York City. Civil legal resources can be scarce or difficult to access in the rest of the state, particularly in rural communities. The website features a user-friendly screening tool that allows crime victims to identify what legal needs they may have and then locate relevant resources; a searchable legal service help directory with filters to isolate organizations that can assist with specific issues; a self-help resource library to inform them of their rights; and a live chat function to access referral information in real time.

The website's screening tool and legal help directory will help connect crime victims from Erie, Genesee and Niagara counties with advocates and non-profit legal organizations that may be able to assist them. Crime victims in areas outside of those three counties may still use the website to find information about their rights, learn more about their legal issues, and access resources such as legal forms and links to other service providers. By the end of next year, the screening tool and legal help directory will be available in the state's 57 counties outside of New York City.

The New York Crime Victims Legal Help website focuses on the most common civil legal problems identified by crime victims and service providers through a needs assessment conducted by the Center for Human Services Research: family, housing, finances, employment, and immigration matters. Erie, Genesee and Niagara counties were selected for the pilot because they already have a strong network of civil legal services and the three counties have a cross-section of urban and rural communities.

Pro Bono Net and the Empire Justice Center also identified legal advocates who will assist crime victims using the website and recruited trained law student volunteers who will staff the website's live chat function. The federal Office of Victims of Crime awarded the \$1.5 million grant to the state Office of Victim Services for the project.

Remla Parthasarathy, Crime Victims Legal Help Project Leader at the Empire Justice Center, said, "Empire Justice Center is proud to be part of this project and we are really excited about its potential. While the online resource is currently being piloted on a limited basis, much of the site is accessible throughout the state, making the 'Know Your Rights' library and the free legal forms sections available to provide current, accurate information to any victim of crime who has civil legal concerns. We look forward to continuing to expand the content and legal directory on the site to include civil legal providers from across New York."

Pro Bono Net Program Director Liz Keith said, "New York Crime Victims Legal Help offers a user-friendly online resource to ensure victims of crime can find and understand the information they need in legal matters pertaining to housing, family law, and safety concerns. We look forward to working with our partners on this effort to expand the site's capacity to reach more victims statewide and to strengthen the essential work of legal advocates and nonprofit organizations assisting them."

Susan Ehrhard-Dietzel, Senior Research Scientist at UAlbany's Center for Human Services Research, said, "Crime Victims Legal Help will be a phenomenal resource for underserved and disadvantaged populations in Western New York and throughout Upstate and Long Island in the near future. UAlbany's Center for Human Services Research has been a proud partner in this meaningful endeavor and looks forward to seeing the positive impact the network will have in helping and empowering crime victims."

The Office of Victim Services provides a safety net for crime victims and/or their family members, helping eligible individuals with medical and counseling expenses, funeral and burial expenses, lost wages and support, in addition to other assistance, all at no cost to taxpayers. The agency also funds 222 victim assistance programs that provide direct services, including counseling, advocacy and legal services, across the state. For more information, eligibility guidelines and to locate a victim assistance program, visit www.ovs.ny.gov or call 1-800-247-8035.

The mission of the Empire Justice Center (www.empirejustice.org) is to protect and strengthen the legal rights of the poor, disabled or disenfranchised through advocacy, training to other advocates, and high-quality direct civil legal representation. Based in New York City, Pro Bono Net (www.probono.net) is a nonprofit leader in developing innovative technology and forging collaborations to increase access to justice.

The Center for Human Services Research (www.albany.edu/chsr) is part of UAlbany's School of Social Welfare and has more than 20 years of experience conducting evaluation research, designing information systems, and informing policy and program development for a broad spectrum of agencies serving vulnerable populations.

Crime Victims Legal Help (<https://crimevictimshelpny.org/>) was established as a result of work done by the New York State Office of Victim Services and its partner agencies, the Center for Human Services Research, the Empire Justice Center and Pro Bono Net, under Grant No. 2014-XV-BX-K009 awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Article Links

- [NY Crime Victims Legal Help](#)
- [Empire Justice Center](#)
- [Pro Bono Net](#)