

Downtown Office

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New York, NY 10013
212-335-9040
212-335-9500 (TTY)

Northern Manhattan Office

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New York, NY 10027
212-864-7884

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Services for Crime Victims, Witnesses, and their Families



CYRUS R. VANCE, JR.
DISTRICT ATTORNEY





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Dear Friends,

Crime and its aftermath can be a difficult and painful experience. As District Attorney of New York County, I am committed to providing comprehensive services, through this office's Witness Aid Services Unit, to assist crime victims and witnesses who are involved in the criminal justice process. Please take some time to learn about the services that are described in this brochure so that the District Attorney's Office can be of help to you.

Sincerely,

Cyrus R. Vance, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

The Witness Aid Services Unit provides a variety of court-related services, social services, and counseling services designed to meet the needs of crime victims, witnesses, and their families. The unit also provides information related to the prosecution of the case, assists victims in understanding the criminal justice system, and provides information regarding crime victims' rights.

The unit assists victims in overcoming the emotional trauma resulting from victimization and provides advocacy and support throughout the criminal justice process. The unit also works collaboratively with assistant district attorneys to assist victims.

The unit has a staff of 35 and is comprised of five departments. Spanish speaking staff are available in each of the departments. Interpreters for other languages are also available. All services offered by the unit are free of charge.

For the convenience of victims, the Witness Aid Services Unit provides services in the District Attorney's downtown and Northern Manhattan offices (Counseling and Social Services Departments only). The Witness Aid Services Unit can be reached at 212-335-9040.

The departments of the Witness Aid Services Unit are:

- Victim Assistance Center
- Social Services Department
- Counseling Department
- Notification Department
- Property Release Department

"I never thought I would be a statistic, but having found myself as one, I am grateful for the many services offered by the Witness Aid Services Unit."

Crime Victim

The Victim Assistance Center is a secure, comfortable, supportive environment where victims, witnesses, and their families are introduced to the extensive services available to them through the District Attorney's Office. Victims also receive information about their rights in the criminal justice system and are afforded an opportunity to provide information important to the prosecution of the case.

The staff of the Victim Assistance Center will:

- Explain the criminal justice system and orient victims to their role in the prosecutorial process.
- Serve as the liaison between victims and Assistant District Attorneys, the New York Police Department, the court system, and other criminal justice agencies
- Provide victims with case information and answer questions regarding the court process
- Provide information about an inmate's custody status and help victims to register for notification of an inmate's release from a correctional facility
- Advocate for obtaining a court order of protection
- Arrange transportation to court for victims and witnesses who are elderly, disabled, or injured; a wheelchair is also available
- Prepare absence excusal letters for employers and schools

The Victim Assistance Center is located at 100 Centre Street, Room 231. The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The staff can be reached at 212-335-9040.

The Social Services Department provides essential services to victims, witnesses, and their families to address their social and financial needs. Based on this assessment, the social services staff provides direct services as well as advocacy and referral information.

The services provided by this Department include:

- Crisis intervention and support
- Assistance with safety services
- Referrals to shelters
- Accompaniment to court
- Specialized assistance for child victims
- Advocacy for government entitlements
- Advocacy and referrals to community agencies
- Compensation assistance through the New York State Office of Victim Services

The Social Services Department is located in both the District Attorney's downtown and Northern Manhattan Offices. To learn more about these and other services, call the Social Services Department at 212-335-9040, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

"You have helped me in so many ways, physically, emotionally, and mentally. I can't begin to explain how much you have helped me to reach my lifelong goal of being totally independent and showing me there is a light at the end of despair, at the end of the tunnel."

Crime Victim

The Counseling Department helps victims, witnesses, and their families deal with the emotional impact of victimization. Victims may experience symptoms such as anxiety, depression, flashbacks, and difficulty sleeping, eating, and concentrating.

The Counseling Department also assists victims in dealing with difficulties associated with their participation in the legal process. The Counseling Department is staffed by New York State licensed social workers.

The services provided by this department include:

- Individual counseling
- Group counseling for victims of domestic violence and survivors of homicide victims
- Assistance with the preparation of victim impact statements
- Emergency assessment and intervention

The Counseling Department is located in both the District Attorney's downtown and Northern Manhattan Offices. Counselors are available Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Evening hours are available upon request. For more information or to make an appointment, call the Counseling Department at 212-335-9633.

The Notification Department offers a variety of court-related assistance to victims that eliminate unnecessary court appearances and provide victims with important case-related information.

The staff in the Notification Department:

- Provide victims with information regarding the status of the case
- Ensure that victims receive their court order of protection in a timely manner
- Notify victims of sentencing information and victims' rights information
- Explain corroborating affidavits and their importance to the prosecution of a Criminal Court case — most cases require that the victim sign a corroborating affidavit
- Assist victims in making requests for notification of an inmate's release from city and state correctional facilities

For more information about the services provided by the Notification Department, call 212-335-9374, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

“The staff of the Witness Aid Services Unit were most helpful, knowledgeable, and informative. They handled themselves with a very high level of professionalism, courtesy, and true caring.”

Crime Victim

The Property Release Department coordinates the release of stolen property which has been held as evidence by the New York Police Department.

The staff in the Property Release Department:

- Explain all applicable property release procedures
- Facilitate and expedite the release process
- Provide special assistance for victims who are elderly, disabled, or live out of the New York City area

For assistance in obtaining a release of stolen property, call the Property Release Department at 212-335-9863, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

“Let me express my gratitude for your assistance in the matter concerning my property. It is nice to know that there are competent and helpful public servants like you who are committed to serving the people of our great city.”

Crime Victim

Victims have certain rights in the criminal justice system. Depending upon the type and disposition of the case, a victim may be entitled to:

- Protection from threats, physical injury, or other types of intimidation; obtain an order of protection from the court
- Protection from employer dismissal or penalties for attendance at a criminal action as long as the employer is notified at least one day in advance. Wages, however, may be withheld for time spent attending the criminal action.
- Financial compensation from the New York State Office of Victim Services
- Retrieve stolen property held as evidence unless there is a compelling reason for retaining it
- Make a statement to the Department of Probation for consideration by the judge when determining the defendant's sentence
- Request restitution as part of a defendant's sentence
- Make an oral statement to the court at the defendant's sentencing
- Notification of the final disposition of the case
- Make a written or oral statement to the New York State Division of Parole for consideration when determining whether to parole an inmate from a state correctional facility
- Receive an automated and/or written notification of the release of an inmate from a city or state correctional facility

To learn more about these rights, speak to any member of the Witness Aid Services Unit staff.

- Criminal cases are prosecuted by the District Attorney’s Office on behalf of the People of the State of New York. Victims, therefore, do not need their own attorney.
- As a crime victim, you are a witness in the prosecution of your case.
- As a witness for the State, a victim has certain responsibilities to assist with the prosecution of a criminal case. These responsibilities may include signing an affidavit and providing testimony to a grand jury and at trial.
- A victim is under no obligation to speak about the facts of the case with anyone other than a representative of the District Attorney’s Office. If someone contacts you concerning the case, make sure that you ask that person to identify him or herself.
- If you receive a subpoena, you must appear in court as specified by that subpoena.
- When you answer a question, you must tell the truth.
- If others advise you not to appear in court, or if you are threatened or harassed, immediately contact the Assistant District Attorney assigned to the case or the Witness Aid Services Unit at 212-335-9040.

Docket Number

Indictment Number

Witness Aid Services Unit Staff

Witness Aid Staff’s Telephone Number

Assistant District Attorney

Assistant District Attorney’s Telephone Number

*NYSID Number

Additional Information

* The NYSID (New York State Identification) number is helpful when using the VINE Program. The VINE Program is a free 24-hour hotline that provides victims with custody information and an automated release notification regarding inmates in the custody of the New York City Department of Correction and the New York State Department of Correctional Services. To access VINE, call 1-888-846-3469 (1-888-VINE4NY), go to www.vinelink.com, or speak to any member of the Witness Aid Services Unit staff.