

Dealing with Victims of Crime

A brief guide for probation and parole officers

Probation and Parole Officers are often unsure about what information they are permitted to disclose to victims of crime. There are a number of Acts and (MCS) Directives that provide the authority to release specific offender information to victims. For example, the June 11, 1996 "*Victims' Bill of Rights*" supports and recognizes the needs and rights of victims and legislates a set of principles including the victim's right to access information about offenders. This information includes, for example:

- access to information about the progress of criminal investigations and prosecutions and the sentencing and interim release of offenders from custody; and
- access to information about the conditional release of offenders from custody, including release on parole, temporary absence, or escape from custody.

Under the Act, victims also require access to information concerning services and remedies available to them such as counselling, shelters, financial remuneration etc.

The specific information that can be disclosed to victims is clearly outlined in Directive 22196 "*Sharing of Offender Information Specific to a Named Adult Offender with Third Parties*". If you have not already seen this, ask your Area Manager for a copy. As a quick summary, PPOs can release information about:

- whether the offender is on probation, parole, or in custody;
- parole eligibility date;
- parole board decisions;
- TAP (Temporary Absence Pass) decisions;
- escape or UAL (unlawfully at large) status;
- discharge date; and
- statutory conditions of probation, parole, and conditional sentence, as well as any *conditions that relate directly to the victim*, for example, non-association, child access status etc.

Victims are not entitled to information about:

- offenders' participation in counselling or other programming;
- information about offenders' behaviour while in custody or under community supervision,
- exact address on release from custody (information about general geographic area of release can be given) or
- the name of the correctional facility where the offender is being housed.

Responding to the needs of victims can be very time consuming for PPOs, especially in cases where they might have to keep track of an offenders release status and notify victims of release dates. Referring victims to the *Victim Support Line*, a province-wide,

toll-free information line, can assist PPOs in helping to address the many needs and fears of victims.

By dialing 1-888-579-2888, (416) 314-2447 in the Toronto dialing area, victims can access a range of services, including:

- registering to be notified by the automated Victim Notification Service about changes in the release status of an offender;
- being advised to whom they should direct their concerns about an offender's release on parole or TAP;
- speaking to an information counsellor for referral to supports and services in their community; and
- listening to prerecorded information about the criminal justice system, including arrest and release procedures, what to expect in court and sentencing options.

PPOs should not be surprised if victims call them after being advised through the Victim Notification Service of the PPO's name and address. This is done where the victim has specific information or concerns that are best dealt with by the PPO.

If you are interested in further information about the Victim Support Line, or wish to order brochures about the service (at no cost), please feel free to contact:

Corinna Kitchen (416) 325-2966 or

Diane Bedard (705) 494-3362

* This article first appeared in the Autumn 1999 Edition of the POAO's Monitor