



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 4/15/2025

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): District Attorney, Sheriff's Office, Department of Health Services, Human Services Department, Probation

Staff Name and Phone Number: Tatiana Lopez 565-2822

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisory District(s): Countywide

Recommended Action:

Adopt a Gold Resolution in observance of National Crime Victims' Rights Week throughout the month of April 2025.

Executive Summary:

The week of April 6 through April 12, 2025, has been designated as National Crime Victims' Rights Week by the Office for Victims of Crime of the U.S. Department of Justice and the National Center for Victims of Crime. Since 1981, communities across America have joined together annually to recognize the needs and rights of crime victims and survivors. In an effort to provide recognition to crime victims, Sonoma County is joining other counties and states throughout the nation in showing a commitment to raising awareness of the devastating impacts of crime. Sonoma County joins agencies across the country to call upon our community to recognize that crime affects individuals, families, and communities in profound ways, often leaving a lasting physical, emotional, and social impact. This year's theme of "Connection <Kinship> Healing" highlights the connections that build bridges to support, and share strength among survivors, advocates and communities. Kinship is the foundation of victim advocacy, inspiring trauma-informed care that meets survivors where they are; through kinship we build networks and community alliances that empower survivors, foster resilience, and offer pathways to healing. Kinship reminds us of the strength that comes from connections, the importance of listening to every voice, and the power we have to create lasting change when we work together.

Discussion:

During the month of April, in recognition of Crime Victims' Rights Week, outreach activities will take place throughout the county to raise awareness about the trauma experienced by victims of crime and the supportive services available in Sonoma County. District Attorney Victim Services Division will engage with the public through advertising campaigns to bring attention to the services available to victims of crime. Efforts to reach the public include a social media campaign as well as interior and exterior ads on Sonoma County Transit buses, and on-air discussions with local radio personalities, including Spanish language radio.

The following sections identify key services provided to victims within county agencies.

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Sonoma County District Attorney's Office

Historically, victims of crime have been under-served in a system geared to prosecute and protect the rights of the criminal. During the mid-seventies, the State of California began realizing that the trauma and financial loss experienced by victims should be acknowledged and began developing programs to address the problem. The California Legislature mandated that counties establish programs to assist crime victims who suffer the ill effects and trauma of crime. Section 13835.2 of the California Penal Code mandates the scope of services that must be offered. The Sonoma County Victim Services Division was established in 1978 to serve victims of crime. On November 4, 2008, the People of the State of California approved Proposition 9, the Victims' Bill of Rights Act of 2008, known as Marsy's Law. This measure amended the California Constitution to provide additional rights to victims.

The District Attorney's Office Victim Services Division offers comprehensive services to victims and witnesses of all types of violent crimes. Mandated services provided by the Victim Services Division include crisis intervention, emergency assistance, direct follow-up counseling, court escort and support. Some optional services provided include creditor intervention, restitution information, and assistance with funeral and burial expenses through the State of California Victim Compensation Board.

In compliance with Marsy's Law, the District Attorney's Victim Services Division ensures that victims receive all appropriate notifications related to court proceedings. Victims' Marsy's rights are posted on the District Attorney website. In order to better serve victims, the District Attorney implemented a web-based server, linked to the District Attorney's website, where victims are able to access online up-to-date court information and receive electronic notification of upcoming court dates.

During Fiscal Year 2023/24, the Victim Services Division served a total 4,460 victims of which 2,267 were new victimizations. While the number is fewer than FY 22/23, advocates were supporting victims through trauma of more serious crimes, including more juvenile cases that require the utmost attention to confidentiality and can involve heightened emotions. Advocates are handling cases for longer periods of time due to delays in courtrooms and changes in the law.

The District Attorney's Office Victim Services Division participates in numerous outreach events throughout the year to educate and inform our community about the services offered and available to victims and witnesses of crime. Unfortunately, due to budget challenges, Victim Services will not host a community resource fair as in the previous several years. Instead, Victim Services Division will create a small ad campaign and public service radio spots.

The District Attorney's office is the lead agency for the Family Justice Center Sonoma County, a multi-agency collaborative effort that opened in August of 2011. The Family Justice Center (FJC) concept is a multi-disciplinary, physically co-located model with a coordinated, single point-of-access offering comprehensive wrap-around services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse and child abuse. Family Justice Centers seek to improve services being offered to victims, and to reduce the number of locations a victim must visit as well as the number of visits they must make to tell their story and receive the help they need.

Sonoma County Sheriff's Office

The Sonoma County Sheriff's Office receives approximately 35,000 "911" calls for service each year. Thousands of these calls are victim contacts. The Sheriff's Office provides victim services such as emergency first aid, criminal investigation, assistance with criminal justice process, and referrals to victim assistance resources. The Sheriff's Office works collaboratively with other government agencies to prevent and protect individuals from violence in an ongoing commitment to keeping our community safe. The Sheriff's Office continues to be co-located at the Family Justice Center and is a strong supporter and partner of the FJC and the multi-disciplinary teams that advocate for victims.

Sonoma County Department of Health Services

The Department of Health Services' Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) was created in 1995. The County's SART historically provided 24-hour, seven-day-a-week on call specialized, coordinated forensic medical exams for all child and adult victims of sexual assault in Sonoma County in a caring, supportive, collaborative, and professional manner. A SART conducts a limited medical examination for the specific purpose of assessing, documenting, and collecting forensic evidence. A SART is part of a multidisciplinary team of trained professionals who work closely with the Human Services Department, the District Attorney's Office, local law enforcement, and community partners, such as Sutter Hospital, the YWCA of Sonoma County and Verity, to provide services to victims and families. In 2024, the Department of Health Services transitioned from a county-run sexual assault response team to a partnership with a non-profit organization, SANE-SART, to provide this critical service.

Sonoma County Human Services Department

The Human Services Department administers benefits programs and provides direct services to support the health, safety, and well-being of our community members. Programs include: health care and nutrition benefits programs and cash assistance; employment and training assistance; and protective services for children, older adults, and persons with disabilities. In 2023, the Human Services Department child abuse hotline received 8,917 calls with reports of concern for children in our community. Adult Protective Services received 6,560 reports of abuse or neglect of an older or dependent adult, including reports of financial abuse.

Sonoma County Probation Department

The Probation Department provides a number of services that aid victims. The Department's investigations units prepare pre-sentence reports for the Superior Court that includes a description of the impact of crimes, including victim impact statements. These statements allow victims the opportunity to participate in and influence the court's sentencing process. Deputy Probation Officers provide ongoing contact with crime victims to enhance their safety, explain the criminal and juvenile justice processes, and provide referrals to available victim services. Additionally, the Department works collaboratively with other agencies to identify victims of human trafficking within the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems, in order to refer victims to appropriate services. Deputy Probation Officers supervise offenders in the community, collect restitution owed to victims, and work to ensure offenders understand the impact their behavior has had on their crime victims. These supervision efforts reduce the likelihood of further community and/or individual victimization. Further, in appropriate juvenile cases, officers participate in a restorative justice process that allows the victim a voice in the development of the offender's supervision plan, and officers monitor completion of these plans.

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Prior Board Actions:

Resolutions have been approved proclaiming National Crime Victims' Rights Week every year from 2004 through 2019, and in 2022 and 2024.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

N/A

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Resolution

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

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