

National Crime Victims Rights Week: What is it and Why is it Important?

Leya Williamson

Violence can happen to anyone, no matter your race, gender, sexuality, beliefs, economic status, etc. It can also present itself in many ways, including physical or physiological experiences or even just threats to your wellbeing. Many who have experienced violence find it hard to access resources or even feel they cannot express their pain to others or ask for help; this is why it's important to offer safe spaces and raise awareness.

At DMACC, National Crime Victims' Rights Week is held annually in April, with this year's event spanning from 7th-11th, 2025. The college will host guest speakers focusing on awareness and education about crime victims rights and tables with people there to discuss these issues as well. But why is Crime Victims Rights Week so important? This week helps many people in so many ways, such as raising awareness about victims rights, promoting policies and laws that could support victims, and advocating for those who have gone through these tribulations; just to name a few reasons.

Around 5 million people become the victims of violent crime annually, including rape, domestic violence, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and more. Being a victim of these traumatic crimes can, in most cases, create long-lasting impacts on someone, and can sometimes create secondary problems like loss of relationships, mental health issues, physical problems, and negative impact on occupational and societal function. Because of the prevalence and effects of crimes and victims of crimes, communities and governments have a responsibility to come up with ways to support these victims. This is exactly the type of solution the Victim's Right Movement has created.

The Victim's Rights Movement was presented in 1970, making for a crucial shift in criminal justice. Historically, victims of crimes, especially domestic violence or sexual assault, were overlooked in the criminal legal process and did not receive adequate help or justice. The movement came about to help and recognize the rights of victims and provide them with basic services. Victims rights continue to evolve and more people are learning about and recognizing these rights through the annual National Crime Victims Rights Week in April (Linares et al.).

Crime Victims Right Week started in 1981 as a way to achieve justice for those who have become victims of crimes and has since then been recognized every April ("National Crime Victims' Rights Week"). It has become a dedicated way to teach and learn about victimization, and the effects that it has on individuals, families, friends, and communities. It is also there to promote laws and resources to help those in need ("What is National Crime Victims' Rights Week?").

In 1988, the Office of Victims of Crimes (OVC) was established by the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA). There is also the Victim Services Division, connected to the FBI, that informs and supports victims by investigating the crime they were a part of and receive services such as crisis intervention, counseling, housing, and other critical resources

(Federal Bureau of Investigation). In the 1960s to 1970s, victim assistance programs were founded in three states, and in Texas Senator Yarborough made the first federal crime victims compensation bill in 1965, which was established as law in 1979. In the 1980s, there was increased recommendation to President Reagan for laws at both the State and Federal levels to protect and recognize societies interest in assisting victims to recover, and recommendations from the Task Force to Congress to provide federal funding and assistance to victim assistance organizations (“History of the Victims' Rights Movement”). In 1983, Congress established the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), this act has allowed OVC fund support and services for victims of crimes in every State; their mission has included sponsoring programs and resources that help support these victims of many crimes (dept of justice).

Since the start of the Victims Rights Movement, people have been finding different ways to help and express the importance of these rights. These are just some of the National opportunities for support if you are a victim of a crime, but there are also many great local options here in Iowa. On the DMACC Website there are links to many different support efforts including those for families effected, domestic violence, human trafficking, identity theft, mental health regarding victimization, sexual assault and harassment, support groups, and many others. You can learn more about these different opportunities during the week of April 7th at any of the DMACC campuses. There will be tables with information and activities such as a mandala art workshop hosted by Kate Burgess and student displays, and guest speakers like author Cheyene Hanson, first responders, and others tied to organizations there to inform and share their experiences and help others with their knowledge. It is worth checking out and to learn more about the topic and ways you can help the community and people in need.

Works Cited

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