

The Impact of a Crime

The impact of a crime is different for each victim. How it affects you and those around you is unique. Concerns about the case and the custodial status of the defendant will also vary.

Under federal law, you, the victim, have the right to be heard at any public proceeding involving release, plea, or sentencing. Most often, victims exercise their right to be heard in court during sentencing. If you want to participate in a release or plea hearing, however, simply contact the victim-witness staff for information.

Impact Statement

Not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of others, especially about something as personal as being victimized. Furthermore, traveling to court may be difficult for some. Thus, crime victims have the option of writing an “impact statement” and mailing that statement to the court. In the statement, a victim may outline concerns and explain how the crime has impacted him or her. In most circumstances, the statement will be provided to the defendant’s lawyer and will become part of the permanent record. While we, the victim-witness staff at the U.S. Attorney’s Office, may not write a victim’s impact statement, we may answer questions.

Contact Us

For further victim service information, call the Community Relations Division of the U.S. Attorney’s Office at 612-664-5600. Or, visit the Office website at www.usdoj.gov/usao/mn.

Need Help?

There are steps the victim-witness staff at the United States Attorney’s Office can take to make speaking in court a little easier for crime victims. If you have never been in court, for example, a staff member can take you on a court tour and explain who will be present at the proceeding. Such assistance may be especially helpful for young crime victims. To schedule a tour, or for other assistance in preparing for your court appearance, contact the victim-witness staff.

Exercising Your Right

To Be

Heard

Make it Meaningful

Prior to the imposition of sentence, a defendant has the right to make a statement to the judge. This statement may include a plea for leniency, an explanation as to what led to the defendant's criminal actions, or an account of how the defendant has changed since committing the crime. The defendant's attorney may also make remarks regarding the sentencing.

As a crime victim, you too have the right to be heard in court prior to sentencing. When you exercise that right, you provide the judge with "the other side of the story" and offer balance in the sentencing process. Moreover, you may find the experience personally helpful. While we cannot tell you what to say in court, we can answer your questions. So, feel free to contact us, the victim-witness staff at the U.S. Attorney's Office.



Tips for Addressing the Court

The following tips may help you formulate your thoughts when preparing to make a statement in court.

- » **Let someone in the prosecutor's office know that you want to speak in court.** That person can then ensure that the court knows of your desire.
- » **Prepare what you want to say.** Take some time to think about what you want to say in court. You may prepare and read a written statement or simply make some notes regarding points you want to cover.
- » **Speak in your own words.** Be sure your statement accurately reflects the impact the crime had on you.
- » **Do not exaggerate. *Always tell the truth.***
- » **When making your remarks in court, remember, address the judge, not the defendant.** Keep your eyes and comments directed toward the bench.
- » **When making your statement, speak clearly and concisely into the microphone.**
- » **Provide the court with a brief statement about the financial losses you incurred because of the crime.** The judge may find such information beneficial.
- » **Inform the court of any concerns you may have regarding your safety.**
- » **Feel free to bring a friend or family member with you for support.** Or, ask the victim-witness staff at the U.S. Attorney's Office to accompany you to court.

- » **Make sure your behavior is appropriate, given the seriousness of the proceedings.**
- » **Dress appropriately.** There is no dress code for court. However, you may want to wear a suit, dress, or dress slacks. Generally, people do not wear jeans.
- » **Remember, your statements in court are recorded and made part of the permanent record.** Be mindful that there may be others in the courtroom, including the media.

Questions to Consider

The court is interested in hearing how the crime has affected you. So, in preparing your statement to the court, ask yourself —

- What emotional and physical impact has this crime had on me? Has it affected my ability to work or maintain my normal daily routine?
- How has this crime impacted my future, my dreams, or my relationships?
- Am I experiencing nightmares or other symptoms of emotional stress? Have I been under the care of a health-care professional? What treatment am I receiving?

If you are speaking on behalf of a child, ask yourself —

- How has this crime changed the child's relationship with family and friends? How has it affected school performance?