

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE FOR FEDERAL CRIME VICTIMS AND WITNESSES

The following information has been prepared to help answer questions that may arise. We have included information which will give you an understanding of how the Federal criminal justice system works. The role of the United States Attorney's Office is to prosecute cases fairly and justly. Our actions on your behalf do not constitute an attorney-client relationship and we cannot give you legal advice. The interests of the United States may occasionally diverge from your interests as a victim.

The Criminal Justice Process

As the case moves through the Federal court system, there are several events that typically occur.

INVESTIGATION

ARREST

DETENTION HEARING (POSSIBLE)

The Government is seeking to detain the defendant and may do so based on the statement of the prosecutor or by presenting witnesses and exhibits.

PRELIMINARY HEARING

A Judge determines if there is sufficient probable cause to charge the defendant. This only occurs if the defendant has not been charged by the grand jury.

or

GRAND JURY HEARING

A Grand Jury hears evidence in a non-public proceeding and may issue a formal charge called an Indictment. An Arrest Warrant may be issued at this time.

ARRAIGNMENT

A defendant appears in court and hears the charge(s) against him/her. At this time, the defendant typically enters a plea of not guilty.

DISCOVERY, PLEA NEGOTIATIONS & MOTIONS

This may include hearings & rulings on motions concerning the admissibility of evidence, trial issues, or a possible guilty plea from the defendant.

TRIAL

The Government presents its case with witnesses, followed by the defendant's case. The trial generally results in a verdict by a jury.

PRE-SENTENCE INVESTIGATION & REPORT PREPARED

After a finding of guilt, a pre-sentence report is prepared for the judge by U.S. Probation, at which time you have the right to submit written victim impact statements.

SENTENCE

APPEAL

The Emotional Impact of Crime

Many victims of and witnesses to crime are emotionally affected by their experience and although everyone reacts differently, many people report common reactions such as:

- Anger
- Feelings of panic and/or anxiety
- Nightmares and sleep pattern changes
- Feelings of self-doubt, shame or guilt
- Reliving what happened
- Depression, difficulty concentrating
- Increased concern for personal safety and that of their family

Many people continue to have these responses for some time after the crime.

Limited Confidentiality Statement

We are here to assist you as you go through the criminal justice process. However, you should know that we work as part of a team with the criminal prosecutor and the investigative case agent. We do our best to keep sensitive information confidential. As part of the team, there are times when we may need to share information you provide with the other team members. This is especially important if you share information regarding your safety, a medical emergency, information that relates to child abuse, and/or information that is critical to the investigation or prosecution of the case.