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State Victim Advocate

Submitted to the Appropriations Committee
Monday, February 22, 2021
Office of the Victim Advocate Budget

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) was statutorily established in 1998 as an independent state agency charged with the promotion and protection of the constitutional and statutory rights of crime victims in Connecticut. OVA's mission seeks to ensure that victims of crime become an integral part of the criminal justice system. Through public education of the legal rights and services available to crime victims, collaboration with law enforcement and victim service providers, as well as court and legislative advocacy, the OVA works to improve and enhance the rights of crime victims in our state.

The OVA is staffed by myself and three staff members: Hakima Bey-Coon, Esq., Staff Attorney 3, Merit Lajoie, Compliant Officer and Vanessa Torres, Administrative Assistant. In fiscal year 2020, the OVA continued all office operations despite the pandemic and court closures. In addition, the OVA saw an increase in calls largely due to the limited operations of the criminal courts. The OVA will continue to closely monitor adherence to crime victims' rights as the criminal courts resume business, particularly with the use of alternatives to in-person appearances.

Further, the OVA is monitoring the enhanced opportunities extended to offenders to ensure compliance with crime victims' rights to notification and participation. The OVA is essential to uphold the constitutional rights of crime victims that are often tested under criminal justice reforms. The OVA is committed to ensuring that the voices of crime victims remain at the forefront.

The proposed allocation of \$428,028 will allow OVA's dedicated staff to continue providing state-wide victims' rights enforcement and advocacy on behalf of Connecticut crime victims.