



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Shapiro-Davis Administration Highlights Berks County Collaboration to Support Victims and Survivors of Crime

Governor Shapiro's budget proposes \$5 million to help crime victims with expenses including medical, counseling, loss of earnings, relocation, funeral, crime scene cleanup, and more.

Berks, PA — In honor of Crime Victims' Rights Week, the **Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)** visited the Berks County Courthouse today to highlight the county's collaborative approach in supporting victims and the importance of Governor Shapiro's proposed \$5 million investment in the Victims Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP) in the 2024-25 state budget.

"We stand with survivors of crime and want to remind all Pennsylvanians that there are programs and advocates who are available to provide support," said **Kathy Buckley, Director of the Office of Victims' Services for PCCD**. "PCCD's Victims Compensation Assistance Program in collaboration with the multi-disciplinary network of services here in Berks County and across the state are proof that when our systems work together, we can better the lives of Pennsylvanians who have been affected by violence and crime."

[Safe Berks](#) is the local victim service program for residents of Berks County and provides ongoing support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault through advocacy, counseling, housing and shelter, legal, and crisis hotline services. Since the start of 2024 alone through Safe Berks:

- 131 victims/survivors received help through their 24/7/365 hotline;
- 134 victims/survivors received more than 5,240 nights of emergency shelter in Safe Berks' safe house;
- 160 victims/survivors received assistance seeking protection orders;
- 172 victims/survivors received personal advocacy and/or accompaniment; and
- Over 500 individual counseling sessions were provided to victims/survivors and/or their families.

"Berks County's multi-disciplinary approach provides domestic and sexual violence victims/survivors with a coordinated, supportive, and cohesive team response to minimize re-traumatization during the investigation and prosecution process pertinent to holding offenders accountable," said **Safe Berks CEO Beth Garrigan**. "Our partnerships with the DA's Office,

Reading Police Department, and the Children's Alliance Center are invaluable to the victims/survivors we serve at Safe Berks."

Safe Berks works closely with the Children's Alliance Center and Victim/Witness Unit within the Berks County District Attorney's Office, the Reading Police Department, and other local law enforcement agencies to ensure that all victims and survivors of crime are provided comprehensive support and services.

Supporting Youth Victims

The ***Children's Alliance Center*** is an example of collaboration in Berks County to serve victims of child abuse. The center provides services to approximately 350 children each year, with the goal of reducing trauma by providing a multi-disciplinary response. By bringing law enforcement, prosecutors, child protective services, victim advocacy agencies, and medical/mental health professionals who specialize in child sexual abuse together under one roof, child advocacy centers (CACs) like the Children's Alliance Center help bring healing and justice to victims of child abuse.

Helping Victims Navigate the Criminal Justice Process

The ***Berks County Victim/Witness Assistance Unit*** was established to assist victims and witnesses of crime and their immediate family members throughout the criminal justice process. The unit provides services to approximately 6,000 victim/witness each year, with their mission of serving as advocates for the enforcement of fundamental rights for victims of crime. The free services provided through this unit of the Berks County District Attorney's Office include court accompaniment, case information and notification, assistance with impact statements, referrals, and more.

Reducing Domestic Violence Fatalities

The **[Lethality Assessment Program \(LAP\)](#)** is another example of the critical collaboration between local law enforcement agencies and Safe Berks to prevent domestic violence homicides and injuries by connecting victims with lifesaving services. The LAP is a nationally recognized, evidence-based initiative with success in strengthening community partnerships and preventing intimate partner homicides and serious injuries based on a screening process conducted by law enforcement when called to domestic violence-related incidents.

Since 2012, PCCD has partnered with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) to support LAP implementation in Pennsylvania. More than a decade later, the LAP is utilized by 436 law enforcement agencies and 48 domestic violence programs across 51 Pennsylvania counties, including Berks County. The Reading Police Department has been involved with the program since 2014.

Providing Financial Assistance to Victims

Administered by PCCD, the ***Victims Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP)*** serves as a critical financial lifeline for people who have experienced crime victimization. Over the past five years, PCCD has paid more than 76,000 VCAP claims totaling \$65 million in eligible expenses for citizens across all 67 Pennsylvania counties, including medical and counseling expenses, loss of earnings, loss of support, stolen cash, relocation, funeral, or crime scene cleanup, among others.

VCAP worked directly with 638 Pennsylvania police departments to analyze reports of crimes which fall under an eligible VCAP expense category to help victims receive financial assistance they may need in a timely manner. The Reading Police Department has one of the best VCAP response times in the Commonwealth, taking an average of 18.5 days to respond to PCCD requests for police reports.

Governor Shapiro's proposed \$5 million dollar investment into Pennsylvania's Crime Victim Compensation Fund in the 2024-25 state budget comes at a crucial juncture. For the past few years, VCAP's expenditures have outpaced deposits into the Crime Victims Compensation Fund, putting the VCAP fund at a critically low level. The proposed infusion of state funding in the Shapiro-Davis budget will set VCAP on a more stable course, ensuring that crime victims can continue to receive the support they need and deserve.

If you or someone you know was affected by a crime, visit the [PA Crime Victims website](#) for information and resources.

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