

# ARIZONA CAPITOL TIMES

## What the state is doing to help further victims' rights

By: Guest Opinion April 12, 2019

# OPINION

During the month of April, we recognize both Sexual Assault Awareness Month and National Crime Victims' Rights Week (April 7-13). The theme for this year's National Crime Victims' Rights Week is "Honoring our Past...Creating Hope for the Future."

As one of Arizona's largest funders of victims' services each year, ACJC places great focus on seeking legislative changes that advocate for victims' rights, provide additional resources, and improves accessibility to victims' services and programs. We do this work to build upon the foundation Arizona created when it passed one of the nation's first Victims' Bill of Rights in 1990.

The Arizona Criminal Justice Commission oversees and administers two key programs to assist victims: Arizona's Crime Victim Compensation and Crime Victim Assistance programs. The Crime Victim Assistance program provides grants to private non-profit or government agencies that deliver direct services to crime victims. The Crime Victim Compensation program provides financial assistance to victims who may have experienced a financial loss as a direct result of a crime. In FY2018, the Victim Compensation Program provided program assistance to 1,794 victims and 2,540 individuals (relatives and associated individuals). For FY2019, the program has been allocated approximately \$4.5M from both state and federal funds to assist victims statewide.

Over the past five years, ACJC has spearheaded the following legislative and programmatic changes that benefit victims of crime in Arizona:



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During this current 2019 legislative session, ACJC is working with the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual & Domestic Violence and Sens. Victoria Steele, D-Tucson, and Eddie Farnsworth, R-Gilbert, to pass SB 1250. This important bill will close a significant gap in the injunctions against harassment process for victims of sexual assault who, under the current statute, must be victimized more than once before being able to seek relief from the court.

ACJC and our partners do not think it is fair to require someone to be a victim of sexual assault more than once before they can seek protection from their attacker. We hope that we will be able to celebrate the legislature passing the bill and Gov. Doug Ducey signing it into law during Sexual Assault Awareness month.

In 2018 the Legislature passed HB 2249, which oversaw the first comprehensive re-write of Arizona's orders of protection/injunction against harassment process in over 25 years (modernizes and provides easier access to individuals seeking protection from the courts and increases the likelihood that orders and injunctions will be served and enforceable by law enforcement).

In 2017 passed HB 2375, which created a stay of debt collection process for individuals participating in the victim compensation program and required health care providers who accepted payment as payment in full for their services (added significant financial protections for crime victims).

In 2015 passed Senate Bill 1295, which closed a gap in missing fingerprints by those who committed a crime to ensure that an accurate criminal history is created in the state system (increased protections for sensitive populations in Arizona that require a criminal history background check for workers).

These are just a few efforts ACJC has undertaken on behalf of crime victims, but we know we can and must do better!

As we honor victims and their rights this week and month, let us recommit to fighting the good fight on their behalf every day until all victims have a chance for their voice to be heard.

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