

The Pike County Courier

Pike promotes victims' rights

Published: April 22, 2010

April 18-24: National Crime Victims' Rights Week

MILFORD — The Pike County Commissioners set this as a time to honor the individuals and the ideals that inspired the victims' rights movement.

The commissioners and Victim Witness Coordinator Mary Beth Sayles joined with crime victims, survivors, and those who serve them to commemorate National Crime Victims' Rights Week, April 18 to 24. The commissioners earlier this month proclaimed the week of April 18 to 24, 2010 to be crime victims' rights week in Pike County.

The proclamation this year is themed — "Crime Victims' Rights: Fairness. Dignity. Respect." — reflecting a decades-long struggle to secure victims' rights in communities across the nation.

Central among them is the right to be heard during court hearings, the right to access services that can help them rebuild their lives, and the right to be notified if an offender is released from jail or prison.

In addition to Pike County's Victim/Witness Coordinator - PA SAVIN, Pennsylvania's Crime Victim Notification Service, is a free, confidential service that helps to support and uphold these rights. Here in Pike County, PA SAVIN gives victims and other concerned citizens around-the-clock access to the custody status of jailed offenders and provides automated telephone or e-mail notification of key activities related to their cases, including a county inmate's release, transfer or escape.

"PA SAVIN promotes fairness, dignity, and respect for crime victims by providing a critical service that enhances their personal safety and helps them make informed choices about their cases, their alleged or convicted offenders, and their lives," said District Attorney Raymond Tonkin.

In addition to the county jail inmates, the PA SAVIN service is currently in a pilot stage to include state

inmates under the jurisdiction of the state Department of Corrections and the Board of Probation and Parole.

“Victims have their basic human rights of fairness, dignity, and respect stripped away during a crime,” Mary Beth Sayles explained. “PA SAVIN helps to restore those rights by keeping victims informed and involved in their cases.”

Over the last three decades, Pennsylvania has made great strides in enhancing its support of crime victims. Those advancements include:

Crime Victims’ Bill Of Rights (1984), which established technical assistance and training grant programs for crime victim services;

Creation of the Pennsylvania Office of Victim Advocate (1995), to represent the rights and interests of crime victims statewide and connect victims with local services during the post sentencing phase;

Creation of a state office of Victim Services (1995) to establish priorities for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency in the areas of victims’ services and compensation;

And the implementation of PA SAVIN (2007).

“Victims of crime must always be a priority,” said District Attorney Raymond Tonkin. “When we act on behalf of the rights of victims, we promote justice and we must continue to promote justice through these core victims’ rights at every turn.”

About SAVIN

Initiated in Pike County in 2007, PA SAVIN delivers an average of 450 phone and e-mail notifications to victims in Pike County each year. Currently available in 61 of 63 Pennsylvania counties that operate jails, the PA SAVIN service statewide has made over 290,000 phone and email notifications and supported nearly 500,000 inmate searches since it was implemented in the first county in 2007 through the end of 2009. Over 24,000 people are registered to the system. To register or for more information about PA SAVIN, log on to www.pacrimevictims.org or call 1-866-972-7284.