



DANIEL P. MCCOY  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

COUNTY OF ALBANY  
CRIME VICTIM AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE CENTER  
112 State Street, Room 1100  
Albany, New York 12207-2077  
(518) 447-7100 Fax: (518) 447-7102  
24-Hour Sexual Assault Hotline: (518) 447-7716  
[www.albanycounty.com/cvsvc](http://www.albanycounty.com/cvsvc)  
e-mail: cvsvc@albanycounty.com

KAREN ZIEGLER  
DIRECTOR

## **COURT ADVOCATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM**

### History and Purpose of the Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center

The Albany County **Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center** is a therapy, counseling, advocacy and referral service for victims of crime. The Center is located in downtown Albany and is currently staffed by a Director, three NYS licensed therapists (one of whom specializes in Child Therapy), four Crime Victim Caseworkers, a Prevention Educator, a Volunteer Coordinator and two support staff. The Center is open from 8:30am to 5:00pm weekdays. In addition, it maintains a 24-hour hotline for victims and survivors of sexual assault.

The Center has been an autonomous department of Albany County government since 1975 and adheres to the philosophy of client-centered treatment. The mission of the Center is to “provide direct and comprehensive services to all victims of sexual assault and other crimes of personal violence and to change, through community and prevention education and bystander engagement, societal conditions that allow oppression, especially interpersonal violence, to exist”. The Center is charged by the Albany County Legislature to “provide trained counselors for all victims regardless of their intention regarding police reporting and/or prosecution”. Counseling is kept confidential and client records are protected by the NYS Rape Crisis Counselor Confidentiality Law.

### Court Advocate Volunteer Program

The **Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center** serves victims of violent crime in Albany County. In addition, victims who are children, seniors or disabled may access our services for any type of crime. Services may include:

- ◆ Legal accompaniment and advocacy in Albany County Courts, including Albany Police Court, Cohoes, Colonie, Green Island, Ravena, Guilderland, and Watervliet
- ◆ Assistance in filing compensation claims with the New York State Office of Victim Services
- ◆ Referrals to other helping agencies

Court Advocate Volunteers identify and speak to victims of crime when those victims attend the arraignment of their offender. The volunteer is expected to provide emotional support for the victim, as well as be able to answer questions that the client may have about the criminal justice system. Depending on which court is involved, appearances may be scheduled for either day or evening; we will work with the volunteer to determine the optimum schedule for him or her.

In addition, the volunteer will assist victims in applying for compensation for monetary losses resulting from their crime through the New York State Office of Victim Services (OVS). Volunteers will be familiar with the categories of compensation available, and will fill out the application with the victim while in court. This form, along with the *New Client Form*, *Intake* and *Follow-up* forms will be completed in a timely manner and submitted to the administrative aide.

All potential court advocate volunteers must complete the application provided by the Center. Each applicant is interviewed by a member of the professional staff and references checked prior to acceptance into the program.

The Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center will provide training sessions for all volunteers on victimization and the criminal justice system. Training is divided into “modules”; each of which consists of on-line studies, quizzes and group role-playing experiences with the Center’s professional staff. Topics include an Introduction, Legal Courts & Police, Victims of Crime, Domestic Violence & OVS, Offenders, Family & Civil Court, and Advocates Role & Forms. Upon completion of 15 hours of training, the volunteer will arrange to “shadow” a staff person in court on several occasions. The volunteer will be assigned to a specific court when the staff and the volunteer both feel confident in the volunteer’s ability to work unsupervised. Supervision will be provided as needed by a Center caseworker.

In addition, court advocate volunteers will be required to complete an additional 35 hours of the U.S. Office for Victims of Crime training required to become certified as a Crime Victim Service Provider. This training will be done in conjunction with court advocacy placement.

The Center welcomes all persons 19 years and older as court advocate volunteers.

### Court Advocate Volunteer Responsibilities

1. Complete all victim paperwork and victim contact logs in a timely manner.
2. Complete and submit monthly time logs.
3. Notify the Center of any absences, planned or emergency, *prior* to scheduled assignment.
4. Refer victims to Center staff for additional services.
5. Complete an additional 35 hours of the U.S. Office for Victims of Crime training required to be certified as Crime Victim Service Provider.
6. Attend all training sessions.
7. Notify the Center immediately of any changes in personal contact information; including telephone number, address and email.

### Court Advocate Volunteer Policies

1. A six month commitment after 15 hours of Center training is required of each court advocate volunteer.
2. Confidentiality is paramount. All identifying information about a client, written or verbal, is communicated to the Center staff only. Potential court advocate volunteers will be asked to sign a HIPAA pledge of confidentiality before being accepted into the training program.
3. No alcoholic beverages or drugs are to be used by a court advocate volunteer while on duty.
4. A clean and neat appearance and a professional demeanor are expected of all court advocate volunteers while at any court, police station or public event in which the Center participates.
5. Court advocate volunteers will never divulge their personal phone numbers or addresses to clients or to any persons providing services to the client. In addition, all personal information of any Center staff and Center volunteers must be kept confidential.
6. Violations of any of the above responsibilities and policies may be subject to:
  - a. A meeting with the Supervising Caseworker to discuss Center policies
  - b. A meeting with the Director to discuss Center concerns
  - c. Termination from volunteer activities