

VICTIM/WITNESS SERVICES

Case Status

Current information on court cases may be obtained from the Victim/Witness Assistance Center. The dates of specific court hearings, along with final disposition information, is made readily available to victims, their families, and witnesses.

Court Support

Victim/Witness personnel will accompany victims, witnesses, and family members to court hearings and remain there for support during the court proceedings, when needed. Transportation can also be provided, when necessary.

Credit Intervention

As a victim, your injuries or court appearances may affect your earnings. Victim/Witness staff can intervene with creditors to explain your situation and encourage them to work with you.

Crime Prevention

The Victim/Witness Assistance Center works closely with law enforcement agencies throughout the county. Each department has a Crime Prevention Program available to citizens in its jurisdiction. For further information on "Neighborhood Watch," and other areas of crime prevention, please contact your local law enforcement agency.

Criminal Justice System Information

Victim/Witness personnel are available to explain your rights as a victim or witness, and provide information about the criminal justice system. Sometimes the criminal justice system can be a confusing, frustrating, and intimidating experience. Our office is here to assist you through the process.

Crisis and Emergency Services

The San Luis Obispo County Victim/Witness Assistance Center offers emergency services designed to assist victims, witnesses, and family members to provide crisis counseling, emergency services such as food, shelter, transportation and referrals for victims of crime.

Employer Intervention

Our staff can intercede with your employer and explain why you must miss work for court and other related reasons. We can also help your employer understand the emotional stress you may be experiencing as a crime victim. In these ways, misunderstandings can be reduced between you and your employer.

Property Return

In some criminal cases, personal property is held by law enforcement or by the court as evidence. Assistance can be provided in securing the release and return of the property to you.

Referral Counseling

Victim/Witness personnel are familiar with local, state, and national resources which may be of benefit to you. We can assist you by providing the information necessary to obtain the specific help you need.

Restitution Assistance

If you have suffered a financial or property loss as a direct result of a crime, Victim/Witness can assist you in attempting to recover your loss by having you complete a restitution request form.

Additionally, we can put you in contact with the District Attorney's Small Claims Advisor who may help you recover your loss.

Support for Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Specialized assistance is available to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Victim/Witness advocates work closely with the San Luis Obispo Women's Shelter Program and RISE, a sexual assault and intimate partner violence program, to ensure the safety of victims through emergency shelter and to provide counseling support and other helpful services. Additionally, advocates guide and assist victims through the criminal justice system.

Support for Underserved Victims

Specialized staff are available to provide information, support and other assistance to victims who are seniors, dependent adults, or victims with disabilities. Victim Coordinators work with Adult Protection Services, the Ombudsman, and other local agencies and community resources to help victims and families cope with the effects of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Victim Compensation Claims

Victims of crime or their families may be eligible for reimbursement by the State for out-of-pocket expenses. Coverage may include loss of wages, medical and funeral expenses, and mental health counseling.

Victim/Witness staff are available to review the merits of a possible claim and, if appropriate, assist with preparing and submitting the claim to the State on your behalf.

Witness Coordination and Assistance

Victim/Witness staff are available to help you coordinate your scheduled appearances, let you know just what to expect in the judicial process, and in some cases, go with you to court to provide support during proceedings.

Witness Waiting Room

A witness waiting area is available in Room 384 of the Courthouse Annex. A children's waiting room is available for ages 3 to 5 years by calling (805) 594-1752.

**The Victim/Witness Assistance Center
Office of the District Attorney
San Luis Obispo County
1035 Palm St., Room 384
San Luis Obispo, California 93408
Toll-Free (866) 781-5821
(805) 781-5821
Fax: (805) 781-5828
Email: victimwitness@co.slo.ca.us
Internet: www.slocounty.ca.gov**

San Luis Obispo County Victim/Witness Assistance Center



*Help for Victims and
Witnesses of Crime*

Dan Dow
District Attorney
San Luis Obispo County



Dear Citizen:

As a victim or witness to a crime, your help is vital to our system of criminal justice. Without such cooperation, our system cannot function efficiently. Every year, thousands of people in San Luis Obispo County are impacted by crime - the effects of which may be physical, emotional, and/or financial. All victims and witnesses face anxiety and inconvenience in a system that can be confusing and intimidating.

Since 1977, the Victim/Witness Assistance Center has provided essential services to make the system more caring and supportive of victims, witnesses, and their families. The process of justice takes time, so your patience and commitment are essential.

The San Luis Obispo County Victim/Witness Assistance Center is designed to help victims and witnesses of crime in a variety of ways. The following information will explain what happens in bringing a case to trial, so you may better understand the proceedings and inconveniences that may occur. Please remember to keep the Victim/Witness office informed of your current address and phone number so you can be contacted about the status of the pending case.

The District Attorney's Office is committed to helping all victims of crime. Through providing comprehensive assistance to crime victims we can begin to "balance the scales" of justice.

Dan Dow

Dan Dow
District Attorney
San Luis Obispo County

ORIENTATION TO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Subpoena

A subpoena is a Court Order directing you to be present at the time and place stated. You may receive your subpoena in person or by mail. After receipt of the subpoena, contact the District Attorney's Victim/Witness Assistance Center.

Court hearings do not always take place at the precise time scheduled. Calendar conflicts, the unavailability of a witness, or a legal motion may cause your case to be delayed or "continued." Whenever possible, arrangements will be made to place you "on-call." This means that you continue your normal daily business, but you must be able to come to court immediately when called by Victim/Witness.

Preliminary Hearing

In felony cases, your first appearance may be for the preliminary hearing. This is not a trial, but a hearing at which a judge listens to the evidence of the crime and determines whether it is sufficient to require the defendant to stand trial in Superior Court. Normally, just enough evidence is presented to "hold the defendant to answer" for trial in Superior Court. No jurors will be present, since the judge alone decides if the defendant should be required to stand trial on the charges.

Felony Trial

The trial of a felony case will generally occur 45 days or more after the preliminary hearing. California law requires that a defendant charged with a felony be brought to trial within 60 days of the filing of the Information or Indictment in Superior Court, unless that right is waived by the accused. In some cases, this time could extend to several months.

Witnesses must also testify at trial, even if they were thoroughly questioned at the preliminary hearing. At trial, there will be jurors listening to your testimony. In some cases, a trial will not be held because the defendant pleads guilty. When this happens, you will be notified that your testimony will not be required and you will be released from your obligation under the subpoena to come to court.

Misdemeanor Trial

In misdemeanor cases, there is no preliminary hearing. Your first appearance at court will be the actual trial, therefore, your testimony will only be required once. In many cases, a trial is not conducted because the defendant pleads guilty.

Your Testimony

When you appear as a witness, you will be called to the witness stand by a Deputy District Attorney to testify regarding what you saw, heard, or did which may be relevant to the charges against the defendant. After the Deputy District Attorney has asked questions, the defense has the right to test your memory of the facts, or "cross-examine" you.

You may be excluded from the courtroom when other witnesses are testifying. This is to ensure that the testimony or memory of one witness does not influence the testimony of another.

Defense Attorney

Witnesses are sometimes requested by defense investigators or defense attorneys to give interviews. If you receive such a request, you may discuss it with the Deputy District Attorney assigned to your case. This is your decision and you should not feel pressured to speak or not to speak to anyone about the case.

Verdict

You may wait to see the verdict in your case after all testimony is completed, or you may request notification of the outcome of a felony case.

After the Trial

The victim has the right to appear at the sentencing hearing to express his/her views to the judge. This can also be done in written form to the Court or Probation Department. Staff at Victim/Witness may accompany you for support during the sentencing hearing and assist with restitution.

LOCAL RESOURCES

Police, Fire and

Emergency Medical Services.....911

211 of San Luis Obispo.....211 or 549-8989
(General Referrals)

SLO Hotline.....783-0607
(Transitions-Mental Health)

County Adult Protective Services...781-1790
(Elder Abuse)

County Child Welfare Services.....781-1700
(Child Abuse)

County Probation Department.....781-5300

Victim Information & Notification Everyday
VINE(877) 411-5588

Economic Crime

Bad Checks.....781-5896
Small Claims/Consumer Fraud..... 781-5856
Real Estate Fraud.....781-1053

Women's Shelter Programs

San Luis Obispo Women's Shelter..781-6400
Toll Free..... (855) 574-3583

RISE (Respect, Inspire, Support, Empower)
Sexual Assault & Intimate Partner Violence
Programs.....886-RISE(7473)

Toll Free.....(855) 886-7473