



OFFICE OF VICTIM SERVICES
Focusing on a brighter future

Long-time Advocate Named OVS Director

By **Brenda Keane**, Court Planner II

On August 25, 2023, Mary Kozicki who has 25 years of experience providing services to crime victims in Connecticut was promoted as Director of the Office of Victim Services (OVS).

Kozicki replaces Linda J. Cimino, who retired in July after serving as the agency's director for more than 23 years.

Kozicki joined OVS in 1998 as a victim services advocate assigned to the Hartford Juvenile Court.

In July 2006, she transferred to the Rockville Superior Court advocating for victims in both the Geographical Area and Judicial District courts. The local county bar association honored Kozicki in 2012 with their Liberty Bell Award for her work assisting victims with knowledge about criminal justice laws and their rights as they navigate the criminal justice system.

In September 2014, Kozicki was promoted to a victim services supervisor position and in November of that same year, she was honored with the Mothers Against Drunk Driving Victim Assistance Award.

She transferred to the Court Support Services Division as a Human Resources

COLP Staff Awarded Team Star



The Judicial Branch Commission on Official Legal Publications (COLP) staff assisted OVS with a statutory mandate to provide law enforcement and emergency medical services with a printed domestic violence resource document (JDP-VS-52) to be distributed to victims of domestic violence.

COLP staff printed, padded, packed, and volunteered to ship nearly 10,000 tear-off pads to more than 450 law enforcement and EMS agencies throughout Connecticut (CT).

OVS is grateful for the incredible collaboration with COLP staff in providing safety information to victims of domestic violence when they need it most.

JDP-VS-52 was developed in collaboration with the CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence and available in [English](#), [Polish](#), [Portuguese](#) and [Spanish](#) at www.jud.ct.gov/webforms/

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program manager in July 2021, returning to OVS in October to serve as the OVS deputy director.

Before joining the Judicial Branch, Kozicki spent nearly five years with the Hartford Mediation Area Program, a program of Community Partners in Action where she first was introduced to the needs of crime victims. She conducted outreach to victims to offer mediation and to refer them to appropriate services.

"It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the next Director of the Office of Victim Services. I am proud of the incredible work the staff does every day. I am excited to partner with our community victim service providers as we continue to strive to identify new and innovative ways to broaden our supportive services for crime victims in Connecticut," Kozicki said.

Kozicki holds a Masters in Management and Leadership, a Bachelor of Applied Science in Sociology, and is certified by the Police Officer Standards and Training Council to provide trainings on victim related topics to the Connecticut law enforcement community.

OVS Educates Law Enforcement about Victim Rights, Services, and Civil Protection Orders

By Alexandra Gittines, Court Planner I

The OVS Education Unit has been pleased to participate in the Spector Criminal Justice Training Network's Capital Region Inservice to Connecticut's law enforcement community.

In various locations throughout the year, OVS Education Unit staff presented on OVS programs and services and civil protection orders as part of the sexual assault response training module. This collaboration continues to be a tremendous opportunity to connect with veteran officers.

The Education Unit also trains new recruits at the Connecticut Police Academy (POSTC) and additional police academies across the state.

This training consists of victim-centered topics including: OVS programs and services, rights of crime victims, the impact of crime on victims, law enforcement's role as a first responder to victims, and best practices for delivering death notification.

OVS to Assist Victims at PSRB

By Mary Kozicki, Director

In April 2023, conversations began between the Office of Victim Services (OVS) and the Psychiatric Security Review Board (PSRB) regarding available services for victims of acquittees under the jurisdiction of the PSRB.

As a result of those conversations, OVS and the PSRB have begun a collaborative effort to connect these victims with OVS and available services.

Available services may include accompaniment to hearings at the PSRB, assistance with the development of a victim impact statement, victim compensation, and referrals to community victim service providers.

In August 2023, the PSRB provided a comprehensive training to OVS victim services advocates about the PSRB statutory functions and hearing process.

This training provided OVS' advocates from the Victim Services Unit with the necessary knowledge to support and assist victims who choose to participate in the hearing process at the PSRB.

DID YOU KNOW?

Governor Ned Lamont proclaimed November 12 to December 20 as Survivors of Homicide Victims Awareness Month to support family members of homicide victims and to educate the public about the impact of homicide on families and communities.

Contractor Services Funding Update

The approved State budget for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 23/24 and SFY 24/25 included additional appropriations of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to the Judicial Branch/OVS.

This additional funding will allow OVS to avoid reductions in funding for our contracted service providers. SFY 23/24 contracts will be continued at the same award levels as SFY 22/23, and OVS anticipates similar award levels in SFY 24/25. Seventy-two contractors and subcontractors will be receiving funding from OVS in the biennium.

OVS Hosts Contractor Spotlight Training Event

By Tina Bouchard, Court Planner II

In honor of the 2023 National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW), the OVS Education Unit hosted a week long virtual training event featuring OVS contracted agencies.

Thirteen contracted agencies provided one-hour informational sessions on their programs and services. A total of 16 presentations were attended by 174 professionals, including contracted agency staff, OVS staff, and state's attorneys.

Several presenters stated they were excited to share information about their agencies with other victim service providers. This collaboration, they added, provided valuable information on the programs and services available to crime victims in Connecticut.

The OVS Education Unit plans to host another Contractor Spotlight Training event during the 2024 NCVRW.

Staff Recognized for Services to Crime Victims

By **Mary Kozicki**, Director

On June 12, the Office of Victim Services (OVS) came together as an agency for the first time since December of 2019. The day included a team activity to provide opportunity to reconnect with long time colleagues and to get to know our newer team members who had joined OVS over the past few years.

We also celebrated each team member's contributions to supporting crime victims with a certificate recognizing years of service with OVS.

This included a special recognition of Linda Cimino's contributions as Director of OVS for the past 23 years.

Two service awards were presented, one to Victim Services Advocate Stephanie Barber for her distinguished service in the New London Judicial District providing quality, victim-centered services and her collaborative efforts with other service providers, and one to Victim Services Advocate Effie Cotto recognizing her integrity and ethics, positive professional relationships, and leadership and teambuilding in the Middletown Judicial District.



From left to right officer/comfort dog: Officer Dustin Coleman and Elvy, Officer Alysha Pirog and Frankie, Officer Heather McClelland and Chase, and Officer Eric Fredricks and Hodges.

Photo courtesy of: Director Mary Kozicki

Eileen Russo MA, LADC, provided a presentation on resiliency and self-compassion which recognized the challenging work of OVS team members while also highlighting the rewards of supporting crime victims through trauma informed supportive practices.

In the afternoon we were joined by four teams of police comfort dogs and their handlers and learned about the 15 teams that are available across the state to provide support to crime victims at different points in their interactions with the criminal justice system.

Officer Heather McClelland and Chase from Groton Police Department (PD), Officer Alysha Pirog and Frankie from Bristol PD, Officer Eric Fredricks and Hodges, from Waterford PD, and Officer Dustin Coleman and Elvy from Brown University in Providence Rhode Island

spent several hours sharing their expertise with us and also bringing smiles to all, as they interacted with our team members, displaying the incredible discipline and skill of these very special canine companions.

The day concluded with a recognition of a few of the significant contributions Linda J Cimino has made to victim services in Connecticut as we prepared for her approaching retirement in July and wished her all the very best in the next chapter!

OVS Director Retires

After more than 23 years of service, Linda J. Cimino retired from her post as director of the OVS in June 2023.

Before joining OVS on January 24, 2000, Cimino had extensive experience in the victim services field having served for five years as executive director of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence and seven years as the executive director of Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis.

During Cimino's tenure the:

- OVS logo and slogan were created;
- Victim compensation eligibility and benefits were expanded as well as the removal of access barriers and restrictions to compensation;
- Connecticut Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification system launched;
- Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program established;
- OVS Website launched;
- 9 educational videos that provide information on OVS services, the criminal court process, and orders of protection were developed;

If you would like to submit an article to appear in this newsletter or would like to request a team star be awarded to an individual, organization, or agency for their collaborative work, please email Brenda.Keane@jud.ct.gov

Victim Compensation Unit Welcomes New Staff

By **Rachel McKnight**, Program Manager;
Victim Compensation Unit

The Victim Compensation Unit welcomes Essence Blige, Patricia Camacho, and Joline Dullivan. To become familiar with new staff, I have included brief bios written by them:

ESSENCE BLIGE:

“I am so happy to have joined OVS and to be working with such an amazing and supporting team. I have an insurance background and excited to share my skills and knowledge with my peers to enhance future problem solving. I’m from East Harford CT, and I have two young children and a dog. I enjoy gardening, crocheting, and my favorite sport is boxing. I love hot wings and sushi; I can almost eat this every day! Also, my 3 favorite movies are The Wizard of Oz, Edward Scissor Hands, and How the Grinch Stole Christmas.”

PATRICIA CAMACHO:

“Hi everyone, My name is Trish, and I am excited to be at OVS and a team member. I have two sons and a French bulldog that consume most of my day. If I’m not with them or my partner, I’ll usually be fully engulfed in a book or at the gym (got to keep those endorphins high). I enjoy hiking, cooking, and sleeping. I am happy to be here to help those who need it.”

JOLENE DULLIVAN:

“I’m from Hartford (born and raised). I am very excited to be a part of the OVS family! The last eight years I was a Reimbursement Supervisor with National Seating & Mobility ensuring the clients insurance company processed their complex wheelchairs correctly (oversaw \$10M worth of revenue). Although coming to OVS was a big change in my career, I love the fact that I am still able to help clients during the most difficult time of their lives – Best Decision Made! When I am not working, I love hanging out with family and friends, binge watching Forensic Files, First 48 (any true crime shows for that matter). One of my biggest weaknesses ...TACOS.”



Congrats
Essence and
Randall Ragin
on your
marriage.
Wishing you a
lifetime of
happiness!

Photo courtesy of
Administrative
Assistant Jean
Weisbrod

SAFE Program Welcomes New Staff

By **Denise Covington** Program Manager,
SAFE Program

Kim McKinnon, DHS, MSN joined OVS as the SAFE Program Training Manager on June 16, 2023. She has been in the nursing profession for more than 30 years, and has a background in Labor and Delivery, including ante-partum, post-partum, and newborn intensive care at St. Francis Hospital.

Ms. McKinnon developed her love of teaching while a lab instructor in the simulation laboratory for staff in the maternity division. She went on to teach at Sacred Heart University, educating nursing students about nursing foundation and healthcare across the life span.

While at Sacred Heart, Ms. McKinnon served as the Assistant Director of the Freshman Experience, mentoring staff working with freshman students. Wanting to further develop her educational skills, Ms. McKinnon went on to earn her Doctorate in Health Science with a concentration in Healthcare Education.

It was in the winter of 2022 that Ms. McKinnon heard about the OVS Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) Program from the Connecticut Nurses Association, and she went on to not only become a SAFE, but in less than a year had devoted more than 300 hours to the SAFE Program, developing knowledge and skills while responding to numerous cases.

She is truly a welcome and valuable addition to the SAFE Program’s Training Program.

2023 OVS Trainings

Audience: victim service providers and criminal justice professionals

Title: Victim Compensation Program

Overview of the Victim Compensation Program benefits, process, and how to submit an application.

Dates	Times
10/5/23	9:00-11:30 a.m.
11/16/23	9:00-11:30 a.m.
12/5/23	9:00-11:30 a.m.

Title: CT Criminal Court

Information about the Connecticut criminal court and how a case moves through the process.

Dates	Times
10/24/23	2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Title: OVS Programs & Services

Overview of OVS programs and services available to victims of violent crime.

Dates	Times
9/12/23	9:30-11:00 a.m.

Title: CT SAVIN

Overview of the Connecticut Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification (CT SAVIN) system.

Dates	Times
11/14/23	2:00-3:30 p.m.

OVS Collaboration and Information Sharing Survey Findings

By Brenda Keane, Court Planner II

In early 2023, the Office of Victim Services (OVS) emailed a Collaboration and Information Sharing survey to 41 OVS contracted agencies to obtain additional insight on their staff opinions about and practices related to information sharing and collaboration with other victim service providers.

This survey was developed as a result of an internal OVS implementation team charged with exploring the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) identified during the statewide Victims' Needs Assessment, conducted during 2021-2022 by a contracted public policy and research firm.

The survey return rate exceeded expectations with 83% of the agencies responding.

Respondents were asked to identify the types of victimizations experienced by the victims they serve, the Connecticut counties their services are available, their opinions about the value of community collaboration to improve services to crime victims, and how OVS might support these or other collaborative efforts.

More specifically, respondents were asked to define collaboration and to indicate how often they collaborated. The majority of respondents indicated some level of consistent collaboration (84.9%) and defined collaboration as routine processes, such as referrals, resource sharing, training, and continuity of care (49.1%). Thirty percent of respondents defined collaboration as a more formal alliance, such as coalitions or multi-investigative teams comprising of stakeholders from various disciplines.

A series of survey questions sought respondents' level of agreement and opinions about OVS hosting virtual collaboration meetings: the frequency, time of day, territory (i.e. regional) and subjects for discussion. Most respondents agreed that OVS should consider hosting virtual meetings (87%) and preferred quarterly meetings (64%). Multiple responses were allowed for various subject areas with 93% of respondents selecting issues/trends as a needed subject area with 83% indicating legislative matters and 72% indicated presentations/trainings as beneficial.

OVS management is reviewing the insightful and valuable commentary to decide how to best move forward.

"We appreciate the participation of our contracted agencies as we seek to identify opportunities to connect as a victim services community with the goal of enhancing our understanding of the available services and further strengthening the network of support available to crime victims in Connecticut," said OVS Director Mary Kozicki.

Congrats to

Susan Omilian, an attorney, motivational speaker, trainer and originator and facilitator of the [My Avenging Angel Workshops™](#) for being honored with a 2023 Lifetime Achievement Purple Ribbon Award.

Ms. Omilian was recognized for her work over the last 40 years helping women take the journey beyond domestic violence from victim to survivor to thriver and reclaim their lives.

The survey was emailed to the contract agency's OVS contact, who was invited to share the survey with their team members. A total of 53 surveys were received.