

Backgrounder

Kent County Victim/Witness Unit

The Kent County Victim/Witness Unit is a branch of the Prosecutor's Office dedicated to the support of crime victims and witnesses. It is an important resource to Kent County because of the services and support it provides.

A victim is defined as an individual who suffers direct or threatened physical, financial or emotional harm as a result of a crime.

Purpose

The case managers on the Kent County Victim/Witness Unit are crisis intervention workers that help victims by informing them of their rights and telling them about what will happen should they go to court. They hope to reduce secondary trauma that can occur when victims and witnesses are overwhelmed by the justice system. The Victim/Witness Unit is the bridge between victims and Kent County Prosecutor William A. Forsyth.

History

In 1985, the Crime Victim's Rights Act was enacted by William Van Regenmorter to ensure fundamental rights for the victims of crimes. Prior to this act, the criminal justice system focused mainly on the rights of criminal defendants, with little attention given to the victims and witnesses of crimes.

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Victim's rights became more specific in Michigan in 1988, when a constitutional amendment was overwhelmingly approved by voters. Article 1, Section 24 of the State Constitution outlines the rights of crime victims and mandates services due to them. Victims in Michigan now have the most complete legal rights in the country.

The Kent County Victim/Witness Unit has grown greatly since it began in 1988 with one person. There is now a staff of ten, including seven case managers. The administrative manager is Anita Emrich Droog.

Services Provided

Kent County provides many services to victims. Case managers explain the criminal justice system and the rights of the victims. They help victims apply for compensation for medical expenses or time spent away from work because of the crime. They also keep the victim updated with information about the case, including important dates and times.

The Victim/Witness Unit also refers people with specialized cases to other agencies in the Kent County area.

For more information, please call (616) 632-5400.

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