

# MISSISSIPPI CRIME VICTIMS' BILL OF RIGHTS

## Checklist for Law Enforcement Officers



**This form must be completed and signed within 72 hours of starting an investigation.**

**I have informed the victim, or where appropriate, the victim's lawful representative of:**

- ☐ emergency and crisis services available in the community or area.
- ☐ the availability of victims' compensation benefits and how to apply for benefits.
- ☐ my name and the telephone number and location of my agency.
- ☐ what to do and who to call if the victim is subjected to threats or intimidation.

**I have read to the victim the following statement:**

- ☐ If within sixty days you are not notified of an arrest in your case, you may call the telephone number of the law enforcement agency for the status of the case.

**I have given the victim, or where appropriate, the victim's lawful representative:**

- ☐ a copy of the rights authorized by the Mississippi Constitution and a form to be used to invoke these rights.
- ☐ a copy of the procedural steps involved in a criminal prosecution.
- ☐ a copy of the procedural steps involved in delinquency cases.
- ☐ a copy of the eligibility requirements for restitution and compensation pursuant to §99-37-1 et seq. and §99-41-1 et seq., Mississippi Code of 1972; and
- ☐ the name and telephone number of the office of the prosecuting attorney.

**Refused to Sign:** ☐ Victim ☐ Lawful Representative

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Investigating Officer	Date	Victim or Lawful Representative
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Victim's Address	Street/P. O. Box	City	State	Zip
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Victim's Telephone Number	Victim's Email
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Alternate Contact Information Name	Telephone No.
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## ***Mississippi Crime Victims' Bill of Rights***

### **Section 26(a) of the Mississippi Constitution provides the following rights for victims of violent crime:**

Victims of crime, as defined by law, shall have the right to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect throughout the criminal justice process; and to be informed, to be present and to be heard, when authorized by law, during public hearings.

To implement the constitutional amendment, the Mississippi Legislature passed the Victims' Bill of Rights, which provides certain rights to victims of the following offenses:

- Crimes which involve physical injury or the threat of physical injury
- Any sexual offense
- Any offense involving spousal abuse or domestic violence.

If the crime that has been committed against you fits into one of those categories, you may assert your rights by signing the accompanying form and sending it to the prosecutor or investigator. If the victim of the crime is physically or emotionally unable to exercise these rights, he/she may designate in writing a person to be his/her representative. If the victim is deceased, the court will appoint a representative who is not a witness to the crime. If the victim is a minor, a family member may be designated as the victim's representative, or the court may appoint a representative for the child. The victim who is represented by another person may decide to personally exercise his/her rights as soon as he/she is physically, mentally, emotionally, or legally competent to do so.

As a way of informing you of your rights and guiding you through the judicial process, this packet contains information about the criminal justice system and the availability of support services within your area. This packet also gives you the name and telephone number of the appropriate prosecutor. By signing and mailing the accompanying form, and by continuing to provide the prosecutor with any changes to your address or telephone number, you are asserting the following rights as prescribed in Miss. Code Ann. §99-43-1:

- To receive a copy of the initial incident report at no cost.
- To be notified of all charges filed against any person for the crime committed against you.
- To be notified of any criminal proceeding, other than the initial appearance, as soon as practicable, and of any changes that may occur.
- To talk with the prosecutor prior to the final disposition of your case,

including giving your views on any *no/ pros* (dismissal), reduction of charge, sentence recommendation, and pretrial diversion programs.

- To talk with the prosecutor prior to the beginning of the trial.
- To receive a transcript of the trial, at your own cost.
- To have the trial held without unreasonable delay. The trial judge, in determining whether to grant a continuance, should make every reasonable effort to consider what effect granting the continuance would have on the victim.
- To be present throughout all criminal proceedings, including any hearings, arguments or other matters scheduled by and held before a judge, but not including lineups, grand jury hearings or any other matter not held in the presence of the judge.
- To be provided a waiting area at trial separate from the defendant, his relatives, and his witnesses. If a separate waiting room is not available or its use is impractical, the judge is to do what is possible to minimize contact of the victim with the defendant, his relatives or defense witnesses.
- To have the prosecutor petition the court that you or any other witness not be compelled to testify at any pre-trial proceeding or at trial to any facts concerning your identity, residence or place of employment that could put you in danger if you have been threatened with physical violence or intimidated by the defendant or anyone connected with the defendant.
- To be present at any proceeding where the defendant is going to enter a guilty plea and be sentenced. The judge cannot accept a guilty plea unless you are present, or the prosecutor can assure the judge that every reasonable effort has been made to contact you and notify you of your right to be present. At the hearing, the victim has the right to present to the judge an impact statement or any information about the criminal offense or the sentence.
- To be given the date of a conviction, acquittal, or dismissal of the charges.
- To be given, after a conviction, information about the function of a pre-sentence report and the name, address and telephone number of the probation officer preparing this report for the judge and about the right of the defendant to view the pre-sentence report.
- To make an oral or written impact statement to the probation officer preparing the pre-sentence report for the judge. In making his report, the probation officer will consider the economic, physical, and psychological impact of the crime on the victim and the victim's family.
- To be present at sentencing and to give the judge an impact statement or any information that concerns the criminal offense or the sentence.
- To be informed as soon as practicable of the sentence imposed on the defendant.
- To be given the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the

appropriate agencies and departments to whom further requests for notice should be provided.

- To be given by the Attorney General's Office or the District Attorney, information about the status of any appellate proceeding and any appellate decisions within five (5) business days after the status is known or the decision issued.
- To be notified upon any post-arrest release of the defendant. Sexual assault or domestic violence victims are to be notified whether they have invoked their rights.
- To be notified of any escape and subsequent recapture of the defendant.
- To have any property belonging to you that was taken during the investigation returned as soon as possible. If the property is necessary evidence, the prosecuting attorney may ask to be allowed to substitute photographs where possible.
- To be notified within fifteen (15) days prior to the end of the sentence of the date the prisoner is to be released, and to be notified of any medical release or of the death of the prisoner.
- To be notified that you may submit a written statement, audio or video recording to be placed with the prisoner's records and considered at any review for community status of the prisoner or prior to release of the prisoner.
- To be notified and allowed to submit a written or recorded statement when any change in custodial status is considered, whether such action be by executive order or judicial action.
- To testify at a criminal proceeding or participate in the preparation of the trial without any loss of employment, intimidation or threat or fear of the loss of employment.

These rights do not include the right to direct the prosecution. The district, city or county attorney has the responsibility to prosecute criminal cases. They will decide how the case will be handled, but they will confer with you and will consider your wishes and your needs. The absence of the victim at a proceeding will not prevent the court from going forward. The duty of the prosecutor is to make reasonable attempts to inform; you must do your part by keeping the prosecutor informed of any changes in your name, address or telephone number.

**In 2023, the Legislature added additional rights specifically for victims of sexual assault:**

- The right to be informed by the law enforcement agency handling the case whether a DNA profile of the assailant was obtained from the testing of the sexual assault evidence kit or other crime scene evidence from their case.
- The right to be informed whether the DNA profile of the assailant

developed from the sexual assault evidence kit or other crime scene evidence has been entered into the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory's DNA identification system or CODIS.

- The right to be informed whether there is a match between the DNA profile of the assailant developed from the rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence and a DNA profile contained in the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory's DNA identification system, provided that disclosure would not impede or compromise an ongoing investigation.

## **STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**

### **PROCEDURAL STEPS IN A CRIMINAL PROSECUTION**

The term "victim" as used in this document means "a person against whom the criminal offense has been committed, or if the person is deceased or incapacitated, the lawful representative." Miss. Code Ann. §99-43-3(t)

To be entitled to receive notice of the following criminal procedures, the victim must provide the prosecutor with a written request, which includes the telephone number and address of the victim. The "Request to Exercise Victims' Rights" form given to you by the investigating officer will be sufficient. The request for notice shall be considered withdrawn and void in the event the victim fails to update this information as necessary.

**ARREST:** The victim has the right to be notified when a person is arrested for the crime.

**INITIAL APPEARANCE:** The defendant is taken before a magistrate as soon as possible after his arrest for the purpose of ascertaining the defendant's true name and address, advising him of his rights and setting or denying bond. This is to be done within a very short time period, hours instead of days, and there is no requirement that the victim be notified.

**PRELIMINARY HEARING:** A preliminary hearing is not held in every case; however, if one is held, the purpose is for a judge to decide if there is probable cause to bind over the defendant to the grand jury. The victim has the right to be notified of the date and time of the hearing, of any changes to the date and time, and to be present.

**GRAND JURY:** When the case is presented to the grand jury, they can either "no bill," which is a finding that there is not sufficient evidence for a prosecution, or they can return an indictment. Grand jury proceedings are secret. The victim has the right to be notified of the time and date of the grand jury meeting, any changes to the date and time, but the victim does not have the right to attend. In the discretion of the prosecutor or the grand jury, a victim may be called as a witness before the grand jury.

**ARRAIGNMENT:** After an indictment, the defendant will be arraigned and enter a plea of guilty or not guilty. If the defendant pleads not guilty, a trial

date will be set, and the judge will continue or deny bond. The victim has the right to be notified of the arraignment and the right to be present.

**PLEA BARGAIN NEGOTIATIONS:** After arraignment, the prosecutor, and the defense attorney may enter into negotiations to see if the defendant will enter a guilty plea in return for a charging or sentencing recommendation by the prosecutor. The victim has the right to confer with the prosecutor and to give the prosecutor his/her views on a *no pros* (dismissal of the charge), a reduction of the charge, a sentence recommendation and pre-trial diversion programs.

**PLEA HEARING:** If the prosecutor and the defendant agree on a plea and recommendation, a judge will determine whether to accept the plea and sentence recommended by the prosecutor. The victim has the right to be present at this hearing and the judge cannot accept a plea unless the victim is present or unless the judge is advised by the prosecutor that reasonable efforts were made to notify the victim of the date and time of the hearing, including any changes, and to confer with the victim about the plea agreement. The victim has the right to give the judge and impact statement or any information that concerns the criminal offense or the sentence.

**PRE-TRIAL HEARINGS:** If a plea agreement is not reached and the defendant goes to trial, the judge may set a pre-trial conference. At this conference, points of law are argued by the attorneys. The issues may include the right to a speedy trial, the suppression of evidence, a change of venue or other matters. The victim has the right to be notified of any pre-trial matters to be heard by the judge and to be notified of and be present at any pre-trial hearing.

**TRIAL:** When the case is set for trial, the victim has the right to be notified of the date set for the trial and of any changes made in that date.

**SENTENCING HEARING:** If the defendant is found guilty, prior to sentencing, the victim has the right to give a written or oral impact statement to the probation officer preparing a pre-sentence report. The victim has the right to be notified of the date and time of the sentencing hearing. At the sentencing hearing, the victim has the right to present an impact statement or information concerning the criminal offense or sentence to the judge. If the victim is not present, he/she has the right to be notified by the prosecutor as soon as practicable of the sentence given to the defendant. At this time, the victim is also given the names and address to be used to request notice of any appellate decisions, parole hearings or of the date of release of the prisoner.

**HEARING ON MOTION FOR NEW TRIAL:** If the defendant files a motion for a new trial and a hearing is set by the judge, the victim has the right to be notified of the date and time, and any changes, and to be present.

**APPELLATE PROCEDURE:** If the defendant appeals his/her conviction to the Mississippi Supreme Court, the state will be represented by the Attorney General. If the case is to be argued to the Supreme Court, the victim has the right to be notified of the date, time and place set for the argument. When the appeal is decided by the court, the Attorney General's Office will notify the victim within five (5) business days after the decision is issued that the conviction and sentence have been affirmed, or that the case has been reversed and will be returned to the trial court for a new trial.



**PAROLE HEARING:** The victim has the right to submit a written statement or an audio or video recording to be entered into the prisoner's Department of Corrections records and considered during any review of community status of the prisoner or prior to release. The victim has the right to be notified of the date and time of any hearing on parole or pardon and to submit a written or recorded statement for consideration.

**ESCAPE, RELEASE OR DEATH OF PRISONER:** If notice is requested, the victim has the right to be notified of any escape and subsequent recapture of the prisoner. The agency having custody of the prisoner shall also notify the victim within fifteen (15) days prior to the end of the sentence of the release of the prisoner. If the prisoner has died, the victim will be notified within fifteen (15) days of the death.

### **MISSISSIPPI CRIME VICTIMS' COMPENSATION ACT**

#### **Miss. Code Ann. §99-41-1 et. seq.**

If you or a family member have been a victim of a violent crime and have financial losses resulting from the injuries that are not covered in full by insurance or any other source, the Crime Victim Compensation Program may be of some assistance to you. A single violent crime can have a profound impact on a person's life, resulting in serious physical injury, psychological trauma, absence from work and other financial strains. While no amount of financial aid can erase the trauma of crime, it is the goal of this Program to ease the aftermath of crime for the victim whenever possible.

### **GENERAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

- The victim must report the crime to law enforcement officials within 72 hours after the crime or show good cause for not reporting.
- Application must be filed within 36 months after the date of the crime.
- In cases of child sexual abuse, the application must be filed within 36 months after the crime was reported.
- The victim or claimant must not have been involved in a criminal act at the time victim was injured.
- The victim or claimant, after the injury for which the application is made, must not have been convicted of any felony.
- The victim or claimant must not have two previous felony convictions.
- The victim or claimant must fully cooperate with law enforcement investigation and prosecution.
- The victim or claimant must not have contributed, provoked or in any way caused the injury or death; in such cases, benefits may be denied or reduced.
- All other available sources of payment, such as insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, disability benefits and Workers' Compensation must pay first.

**To obtain an application or receive additional information, contact:**

**Office of the Attorney General Lynn Fitch  
Crime Victim Compensation Division**

Post Office Box 220  
Jackson, MS 39205-0220

601-359-6766

800-829-6766

**[www.AttorneyGeneralLynnFitch.com](http://www.AttorneyGeneralLynnFitch.com)**



## **RESTITUTION TO VICTIMS OF CRIME**

**Miss. Code Ann. §99-37-1 et. seq.**

When a person is convicted of a crime, in addition to any other sentence, the judge may order that restitution be made to the victim for any loss suffered. The judge may order that the restitution be paid in full or in part, in a lump sum or in installments. The victim should make sure that the prosecutor has full information on the extent of the loss so that he or she may recommend restitution to the judge. The losses of the victim should also be a part of the impact statement given to the judge prior to sentencing.

## **AGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION**

Investigator assigned to your case and contact info:

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- If you are threatened or intimidated because of your involvement in this case, please contact (1) your local law enforcement agency immediately and (2) follow up with a call to the investigator assigned to your case.
- If within 60 days you are not notified of an arrest in your case, you may call the telephone number of the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit for (1) the status of the case and/or (2) the name of the prosecutor assigned to the case.

**REQUEST TO EXERCISE VICTIMS' RIGHTS**  
**FOR VICTIM TO COMPLETE AND SIGN:**

**FOR VICTIM'S REPRESENTATIVE TO COMPLETE AND SIGN:**

**I understand that it is my responsibility to provide the investigator or prosecutor with any change in my name, address, telephone number, or email in order to continue to exercise these rights.**

TELEPHONE NUMBER(S)	EMAIL
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
A county-by-county guide to resources that may be of help to the crime victims you serve can be found at <https://www.ago.state.ms.us/divisions/bureau-of-victim-assistance/> under the tab for Mississippi Victim Services Resource Directory. Click on the map and then click on your county for a printable listing of those county resources. You can also click on the directory for the directory of statewide resources.


## **ATTACH COUNTY RESOURCES HERE**

OUR ADVOCATES WILL BE HAPPY TO HELP!  
Please see attached map - Victim Advocates by Region

## Victim Advocates By Region

 Vanessa Wilbert, Northern District  
[vanessa.wilbert@ago.ms.gov](mailto:vanessa.wilbert@ago.ms.gov)  
 Telephone: 601-359-3302

 Maya Edwards, Central District  
[maya.edwards@ago.ms.gov](mailto:maya.edwards@ago.ms.gov)  
 Telephone: 601-359-4144

 Gwendolynn Santos, Southern District  
[gwendolynn.santos@ago.ms.gov](mailto:gwendolynn.santos@ago.ms.gov)  
 Telephone: 601-359-4554

