



For Immediate Release
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Contact: Mary Rappaport, NCVC
(202) 467-8714
Mark Quigly, NCD
(202) 272-2004
Kim Musheno, AUCD
(301) 588-8252

Breaking the Silence on Crime Victims with Disabilities

New Partnership to Combat Pervasive, Hidden Problem Announced

On-line “Town Hall” to Be Held May 30 to Discuss Path Forward

Washington, DC---Addressing the long-neglected needs of crime victims with disabilities is the focus of a new partnership announced today by the National Council on Disability, the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, and the National Center for Victims of Crime.

The ultimate goal of this partnership is to foster greater public awareness about crime victims with disabilities and to forge a national commitment to better serve this particularly vulnerable population.

“For far too long, crime victims with disabilities have been virtually invisible in our nation. Greater understanding by the general public, elected officials and other policy makers, and those in the disability, judicial system, and victim services communities is foundational to addressing the unmet needs of this underserved population,” said John Vaughn, chairperson of the National Council on Disability. “We join our esteemed partners today in calling for a comprehensive approach to turn this situation around.”

Very little reliable national data exists on crimes against people with disabilities. Existing research suggests, however, that persons with disabilities are victimized at much higher rates when compared with the general population. One study, for example, found that more than one-fourth of persons with severe mental illness were victims of a violent crime, a rate more than 11 times that of the general population.¹

With more than 51 million people in the United States reporting some level of disability²—and the nature of disability increasing the risk of victimization—the partnering organizations underscore the critical importance of helping crime victims with disabilities access the criminal justice and social services systems.

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“Crime victims with disabilities should enjoy the same rights, protections, and services afforded other victims of crime,” said Mary Lou Leary, executive director of the National Center for Victims of Crime. “Our partnership represents a historic opportunity to bring the victim services, criminal justice, and disability communities together to identify innovative approaches to reaching these victims.”

In announcing the partnership, the three organizations released a joint statement that calls for **expanded research** to establish the prevalence and impact of crime against persons with disabilities. The statement also calls for **greater public education** to raise awareness about the circumstances and needs of persons with disabilities who have been victimized by crime; **public policy changes** that integrate crime victims with disabilities and their needs into the current framework of federal, state, and local services; increased access to **programs and services** that will help crime victims with disabilities rebuild their lives; and a **national leadership forum** that will serve as a unifying and pro-active voice for crime victims with disabilities. (To see the full joint statement, see www.ncvc.org.)

“Too many crime victims with disabilities are living lives of silent desperation,” said Royal P. Walker, Jr., JD, president of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities. “This exciting initiative can give individuals who have been victimized by crime new hope and bring about a fresh look at this multifaceted problem.”

Advance Announcement: The media is invited to attend an on-line “town hall” meeting that will be held by the partnering organizations on Wednesday, May 30, 2007, at 3:00 p.m. (EDT). This meeting will connect victim service providers, disability activists, and others from across the country to discuss the joint statement in greater detail and identify specific strategies for addressing the needs of crime victims with disabilities. Please call Mary Rappaport at 202-467-8714 for more information. The Web cast is being donated and produced by Independent Living Research Utilization.

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The National Council on Disability (www.ncd.gov) is an independent federal agency mandated to advise the President and Congress on the diverse needs of persons with disabilities and to promote policies and practices that empower individuals with disabilities. The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (www.aucd.org) supports member programs to enhance the quality of life for persons with developmental disabilities. The National Center for Victims of Crime (www.ncvc.org) is the nation's leading resource and advocacy organization dedicated to helping victims of crime rebuild their lives.

¹ L.A. Teplin et al., “Crime Victimization in Adults With Severe Mental Illness: Comparison With the National Crime Victimization Survey,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 62, no. 8 (2005).

² Erika Steinmetz, “Americans with Disabilities: 2002,” (Washington DC: U.S. Census Bureau, May 2006).