

Presidential Documents

Proclamation 6989 of April 15, 1997

National Crime Victims' Rights Week, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

During National Crime Victims' Rights Week, Americans in communities across the country join together to honor victims and survivors, to remember their pain, and to recognize their many contributions to improving our criminal justice system and helping others affected by crime. It is also an occasion for us to acknowledge our significant progress in securing crucial rights and services for crime victims.

As we reflect on the events of this past year, we think of all our fellow citizens who became victims of crime on our streets, at home, in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our workplaces, and even in our sacred places of worship. We remember the images of dozens of mostly African American churches being consumed in flames, and we recall church leaders and their congregations, representing all denominations and races, reaching out to invite healing and rebuilding—not in isolation, but in an extraordinary spirit of community and unity. We also remember the many contributions of crime victims in pioneering crime prevention programs in our schools and working to strengthen our laws and to enlighten all of us about the needs of all crime victims.

Through the dedicated efforts of crime victims and their advocates, criminal justice workers, and responsive legislators, we have made important strides in the struggle against violence. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 allocated an increase in resources for criminal justice programs, deploying thousands of new police officers on our streets. The Brady Bill has prevented over 225,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers from buying handguns since it was enacted. And the Community Notification Act, known as "Megan's Law," is helping us protect our most vulnerable citizens by informing communities of the presence of convicted pedophiles. With community notification, we are working to prevent cases like that of the Act's namesake, Megan Kanka, a 7 year-old who died at the hands of a repeat sex offender released into an unsuspecting community. With these and other preventive measures, we've managed to reduce the rate of violent crime for 5 straight years and to restore hope of reaching our goal of a peaceful America.

We can also take heart in our efforts to assist victims in need of justice and healing in the aftermath of violent crimes. The Violence Against Women Act, a historic and comprehensive plan targeted at ending crimes against women, has provided much-needed services to countless domestic violence victims and their children. Likewise, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, established last year, has responded to more than 73,000 calls for assistance from around the country. As a result of over \$500 million in deposits to the Federal Crime Victims Fund in fiscal 1996, the States will receive more than three times as much in Federal funds as they have received in any previous year to support local victim assistance programs. And the Antiterrorism Act has guaranteed restitution to victims of Federal crimes and mass violence; it has already provided substantial assistance to victims of the Oklahoma City bombing.

This year, we can take one more historic step to ensure that victims throughout our country are guaranteed the fundamental rights to be present at proceedings, to be informed of significant developments in their cases and of their rights, and to be heard at sentencing and other appropriate times throughout the criminal justice process. The Congress should pass a Victims' Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution that will, when ratified by the States, ensure that crime victims are at the center of the criminal justice process, not on the outside looking in.

We must stand united in caring for and assisting crime victims throughout our country.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 13 through April 19, 1997, as National Crime Victims' Rights Week. I urge all Americans to follow in the example of victim advocates and reaffirm our common purpose to protect and comfort one another in times of hardship—not only during this special week but also throughout the year.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fifteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William J. Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "W" and "C".