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How Would You Help? A Call to Action during National Crime Victims Week

BY: STEVE MARSHALL

Each April, the nation takes a week to come together to remember those who have fallen victim to crime. It is a week where we remind crime victims that they are seen and heard and that they are not alone. But it is also an opportunity to reaffirm, as a state and a nation, our uncompromising commitment to justice.

Forty years ago, President Ronald Reagan established the first National Crime Victims Week in response to a nationwide call for attention to the victims of violent criminal acts. That action was followed by the establishment of the Presidential Task Force on Victims of Crime which laid the foundation for a series of landmark laws enacted in the years to follow that established more rights for crime victims. This year, as we observe National Crime Victims Week with vigils and observances across the country, the theme is "*How Would You Help?*" This question challenges all of us to consider what we would do if someone in our family or community was impacted by crime and needed our help. How would we respond?

As a career prosecutor, I know first-hand the difficulties that victims of crime and their families endure as they seek justice and begin the process of healing. It is not easy. It is often a long journey that these families, law enforcement officers and prosecutors, and victim advocates travel together. Last year, I had the opportunity to prosecute a 24-year-old "cold case" in Dale County involving the deaths of two innocent 17-year-old girls. That investigation, trial, and conviction reinforced that deep inherent desire we all have for justice when watching others suffer at the hands of a criminal. Unfortunately, the most horrific cases often result in the most delayed justice and, as a State, we cannot ever let these victims feel forgotten with the passage of time.

As Attorney General for the state of Alabama, I am steadfast in our support of victims and will continue to shine a light on victims and their rights. That includes continually fighting for them when the world – especially the media – wants to minimize their pain and disregard their perspectives. My Office is blessed to have dedicated and talented victim services professionals on hand to assist victims through the long and complex legal process, help them understand their rights, accompany them to court dates, help with crime victims' compensation, and assist with registration for victims' notification services.



Additionally, we treasure our partnerships with local nonprofits like Victims of Crime And Leniency (VOCAL), along with domestic violence service providers, sexual assault service providers, and children's advocacy centers that provide immediate and long-term support to victims and their families. My Office has the honor to lead our state's recently established Sexual Assault Task Force to ensure that these victims are educated and informed of their rights and what to expect from the legal system. These are just a few of the ways that the men and women of the Attorney General's Victims Service Unit serve our crime victim families every day.

Of course, my goal throughout my tenure as Attorney General has been to make Alabama a safer place to live. Less crime means fewer crime victims; I can't think of a more worthy goal for any city, county, or state government official to pursue. That is why, as your Attorney General, my Office will always fight to keep violent offenders behind bars – no matter how much activists masquerading as journalists may hate it. Every citizen of this state has a fundamental right to live free from the fear of violence. We can't become numb to what is happening in far too many communities across Alabama, including right here in our capital city. It's past time we call this evil what it is and fight against it with every resource and tool we have. One victim of violent crime should be more than any of us is willing to tolerate.

This week, I hope that readers take this call to action and join me in showing support for those who have been victims of crime, by providing encouragement and resources to these individuals and their loved ones during their difficult journey toward peace and justice. It is my prayer that Alabamians can lock arms to fight for a safer Alabama by engaging with local and state leaders and, as always, support the men and women in blue who go to work every day to protect their communities from falling victim to crime.

Steve Marshall is the 48th Attorney General of Alabama.