

**Tennessee**  
**Office of Criminal Justice Programs**  
**Victim Centered Roundtable**  
**Key Findings and Summary**  
**2020**



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## Overview

The Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP) manages a systematic, year-round cycle for tracking problems surfacing in the criminal justice system, monitoring trends in Tennessee's communities, assessing the condition of the state's resources, setting program priorities, making grant allocation decisions, and evaluating the results of those decisions. The process helps OCJP focus its future program descriptions, set its funding priorities, prepare its budget requests, and direct its limited resources into areas that promise the best return for the public's investment. One integral part of this process is listening to the voices of the individuals most affected by OCJP's funded programs, including victims and their families, as well as those working on the front lines of criminal justice and victim service.

In September and October 2020, Tennessee Voices for Victims, at the invitation of the Office of Criminal Justice Programs, hosted six two-hour virtual roundtables with participant representation from across the state. These roundtables were developed to identify areas of excellence and opportunities for enhancement related to services for victims of crime, interventions for offenders, and overarching issues within the criminal justice system. Tennessee Voices for Victims co-founders Valerie Craig and Verna Wyatt secured the participants, crafted the virtual meeting groups and questions to guide the discussions, and moderated each session. OCJP Director Jennifer Brinkman, OCJP Deputy Director Daina Moran, OCJP Assistant Director Jeremiah Morton, OCJP Strategic Planning and Outcomes Coordinator Jessica Cleveland, and OCJP Senior Program Manager Trish Davis attended each of the roundtables. Tennessee Voices for Victims provided OCJP with a report at the end of the sessions summarizing the information collected.

The goals of the 2020 Victim Centered Roundtables were to invite input from Tennessee stakeholders and to better understand their experiences with various aspects of the criminal justice system. Six groups were formed with the intent of focusing on a variety of perspectives, classified as follows:

- Underserved Victims and Advocates - survivors and individuals who work with survivors of crimes that currently have fewer resources and services dedicated to their specific victimization.
- Law Enforcement - those who work in law enforcement, including sheriff's departments, police, judges, and district attorneys.
- Criminal Justice - those who work in some capacity in the field of criminal justice. This group represented jails and prisons, re-entry programs, restorative justice programs, and recovery courts.
- Victim Advocates - those who provide advocacy for victims of crime, including child abuse, homicide, sexual assault, and domestic violence

- Justice Involved Victims - individuals who have experienced victimization and now work, in some capacity, to influence change for victims within the system. As survivors, they represented the following victimizations: homicide, domestic violence, sexual assault, and drunk driving. As activists, they represent universities, non-profit entities, and community support groups.
- Crime Victims - individuals who have directly or indirectly experienced victimization, including homicide, sexual assault, elder abuse, and drunk driving.

The six groups reflected statewide representation, including rural and urban areas, and broad demographic representation, including race, gender, types of victimization, and role within the criminal justice system.

Each group of participants was asked specific questions about their unique experiences with different elements of the Tennessee criminal justice system in an effort to identify strengths and weaknesses in the system.

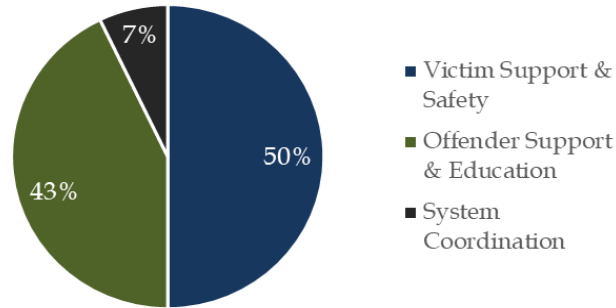
- What practices, policies and services are supporting and empowering victims and their families?
- What areas of the system are failing to keep victims safe and hold offenders accountable?
- Where are opportunities to expand thriving practices; and what needs to be corrected or improved?

Participants who were unable to attend in person were invited to provide written responses to the questions. Those responses are captured in the key findings. Each group demonstrated expertise and passion for the issues discussed, and the key findings below reflect common themes and areas of agreement among the participants.

### *Key Findings*

Across all six groups, several recurring themes were identified related to practices that are working successfully and should be expanded, as well as opportunities for criminal justice system improvement. The themes were divided into three sub-categories: Victim Support and Safety, Offender Support and Education, and System Coordination.

## Successful Practices - Opportunities for Expansion Across the State



### *Victim Support and Safety*

- Victim advocate court accompaniment
- Specialized courts with separate dockets such as diversion courts for drug offenses with an emphasis on restorative justice and recovery rather than punishment
- Support groups and special events for victims of crime such as retreats and camps that provide space for healing and recovery
- Student screening protocols in schools to identify victimization issues and act as an access point for referrals to community partners
- Victim Witness Coordinators within District Attorneys' offices
- On-scene victim advocate support for victims of violent crimes such as rape and homicide
- Alternative sentencing for human trafficking victims, who may have non-violent charges which are used to control and revictimize them

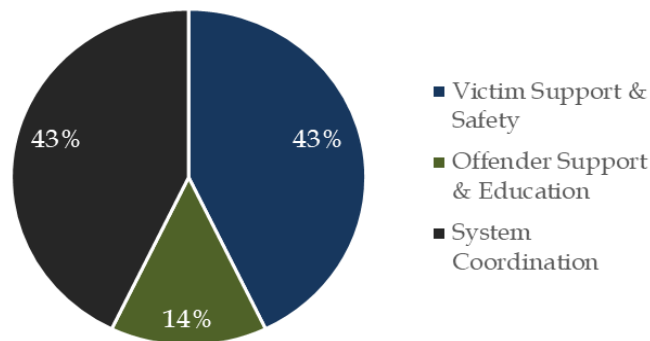
### *Offender Support and Education*

- Re-entry support for offenders for basic life needs, such as shelter, transportation, and jobs
- Education opportunities for offenders such as Lipscomb University's program at the Tennessee Prison for Women, and Western Kentucky University's college class at DeBerry
- Classes for offenders such as Victim Impact and those convicted of prostitution
- Juvenile mentoring programs working with individuals and the entire family unit; modeling healthy relationship skills and the family structure that will sustain beyond the intervention
- Peer support opportunities and communities for offenders, both while incarcerated and after their release
- Restorative justice opportunities - those programs that address low level crimes to provide community intervention that works alongside the criminal justice system

### *System Coordination*

- Multidisciplinary, coordinated case review model (CPIT, CCR) applied to other types of crimes and victimizations

## Opportunities for Improved and Enhanced Practices



### *Victim Support and Safety*

- Increase victim access to services and resources in rural areas
- Reduce barriers for victims attending court (transportation, intimidation, confusion about the system, use of technology to streamline the process)
- Increase safe, dedicated space for victims to receive services and meet with providers at courthouses
- Prioritize court dockets with victims of violent crimes taking precedence
- Increase opportunities for victims to participate in victim impact programming
- Improve accurate and timely victim notification, especially offender release as it relates to victim safety

### *Offender Support and Education*

- Increase offender opportunities for restorative justice within prison and jails
- Increase and improve space to provide counseling and programming to inmates while they are incarcerated

### *System Coordination*

- Create earlier points of access to victim advocacy services, such as an embedded advocate in the police/sheriff department
- Increase and improve uniform training for key system positions including law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges, especially related to domestic violence, sexual assault, the impact of trauma on a victim, inherent biases and victim populations
- Increase and improve the information provided to victims of what they can expect as they move through the criminal justice system
  - This should be as comprehensive as possible from the point of the victimization through the investigation, prosecution, sentencing, and release of their offender
  - Consider making this a part of primary education given the victimization statistics
- Reduce barriers to accessing safety and justice and victim services, especially due to language, sexuality, and gender

While the group identified numerous successful practices related to victim support and safety, as well as offender support and education; there were fewer current successes identified with regard to coordination among different parts of the criminal justice system. Likewise, many of the opportunities for improvement identified by the group related to some degree of systemic criminal justice coordination. This need for increased, formalized coordination among state and local partner agencies, through case reviews, training, information-sharing and collocation, is a key finding of these roundtables and continues to be a priority for OCJP.

### *Conclusion*

OCJP is grateful to each of the roundtable participants for sharing their valuable time and knowledge to help improve systems in Tennessee. The roundtable discussions presented an opportunity to better understand the viewpoints of diverse individuals across the state. While each participant's views reflected their own unique background and experiences, they shared many promising areas of agreement where real progress can be achieved. Though their comments do not represent all victims or all service providers, they do provide a helpful foundation for the development of a plan to successfully address many of the needs identified.

The participants expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity to be heard and to share their perspective with those who shape funding and policy decisions for their communities. They demonstrated deep understanding of the many complex issues facing our criminal justice system and brought bold, creative ideas to the table for consideration.

OCJP looks forward to facilitating additional roundtable discussions annually to continue engaging with informed stakeholders and to gauge progress toward enhancing and improving practices throughout the state.