

July 2019

Dear Friends of Crime Victims Council:

It is said that you can't have growth without change. When I look back at all the changes I have seen in my nearly three decades as the Executive Director at Crime Victims Council, it has been extraordinary.

When I first began with Crime Victims Council in 1990, we had seven staff members and now we have 25 and have waiting lists for some services. We were located in a small row home on 7<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown Allentown and now occupy five different locations throughout Lehigh and Northampton Counties.

Back then, when a sexual assault victim went to the hospital for a rape exam they could expect to wait for hours to be seen, most likely by a doctor or resident who had never performed a rape exam before. Now, specially trained nurses, Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE), are available not only to properly collect evidence, but also to testify in court if needed. CVC has grown close partnerships with the local hospitals and the SAFE Nurses over the years participating in joint training efforts to ensure that victims of sexual violence receive the best care possible. CVC Advocates now come to the hospitals fully prepared to provide victims with a change of clothes for when theirs is taken as evidence, a small snack, and toiletries to help them through this difficult experience.

Some of the biggest changes I've seen came just within the past few years. 2015 saw legislation finally giving protection to victims of sexual violence through Sexual Violence Protection Orders. CVC has provided extensive education and training to the community and professionals on the availability of this new protection. This order prohibits an offender from having any contact with the victim, whether or not criminal charges have been filed, when the victim and the perpetrator have not and never had a family, household or intimate relationship.

So many of the legislative changes that have occurred have impacted the daily work of our advocates and staff who interact with victims and allied professionals throughout the Lehigh Valley. The Sexual Assault Testing and Evidence Collection Act of 2015 was a major change that allowed for rape kits to be held for no less than two years if the victim was not ready to move forward with prosecution. What a huge impact this has had for victims of sexual violence suffering the impact of trauma following an assault.

We have seen such an increase in human trafficking that we have established a position to focus on this extensively and have participated in several operations with law enforcement to connect victims with resources and services. Crime Victims Council also held the Lehigh Valley's first full day conference on Human Trafficking in 2018.

CVC continues to work tirelessly to ensure that the community is aware of our programs and services. We updated our logo in 2017 as we rebranded and prepared for the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Crime Victims Council, making CVC one of the oldest victim service organizations in Pennsylvania. We recently embarked on a valley-wide

billboard campaign and are working now to improve and expand our website and social media presence.

The change does not end there. In mid-July I will end my nearly three decades with Crime Victims Council to assume a new role at the Victims Resource Center in Luzerne, Carbon and Wyoming Counties. This change is bittersweet. While I am excited to begin in my new position, I will sorely miss the many dedicated and passionate staff, advocates and allied professionals who have made victims' services here in the Lehigh Valley their top priority. Without all of you we could not achieve all that we have over the past 30 years. I thank you for giving me the privilege of working with you every day. It has truly been an honor to be part of such an amazing organization that deeply cares not only about the mission but also about the individual survivors it serves.

Suzanne M. Beck  
Executive Director