

VICTIMS OF CRIME AND LENIENCY

422 South Court Street

P.O. Box 4449

Montgomery, Alabama 36103

VOCAL NEWSLETTER

Volume 15 ~ Issue 5

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A NOTE FROM STATE DIRECTOR, JANETTE GRANTHAM

After months of meetings, charts, graphs, and statistical information, the Alabama Joint Prison Task Force recommended a four- to five-year plan which they believe will go a long way in reducing prison overcrowding and recidivism, expand victim notification, and provide supervision to all released inmates. Their recommendation is now SB 67 sponsored by Senator Cam Ward. I know in the beginning, victims were apprehensive about Council of State Governments (CSG) and Justice Reinvestment. Actually CSG (Andy Barbee, Patrick Armstrong, and Cassandra Warney) turned out to be "Good Guys". Senator Ward went to great lengths to ensure rights of victims would not be trampled upon by early release of violent offenders. There will be no early release of violent offenders! With passage of SB 67, an interim task force will be created to address issues of felony restitution collections and payments to victims. In addition to Senator Ward and CSG, VOCAL is also grateful for all the support from District Attorneys Richard Minor, Walt Merrill, and Michael O'Dell. I encourage victims to get familiar with and support SB 67. If our elected leaders fail to act, Alabama runs the risk of intrusion by the big boys from Washington. Other bills which victims need to be aware of are SB 11 and HB 18. SB 11 sponsored by Senator Ward and the companion HB 18 by Representative Greer require a person sentenced to death to be executed by electrocution under certain conditions. VOCAL will continue to watch these three bills SB 67, SB 18, and HB 11.

Remember National Crime Victims' Rights Week is April 19-25. During the week there will be several events and vigils across the state to remember our loved ones and to honor those who provide support and services to victims of violent crimes.

On Tuesday, April 21st, Wiregrass Angel House and VOCAL will sponsor the 12th Annual Conference for Law Enforcement Training. Scholarships are available. State VOCAL Awards will be presented at the luncheon. Remember to get your nominations in before the deadline. If you need more information, go to www.vocalonline.org.

The State Vigil will be held on **Friday, April 24, at 6 p.m. in front of the Alabama Attorney General's office.** Our keynote speaker will be Senator Cam Ward. We will have a PowerPoint tribute to homicide victims, a candle lighting ceremony and balloon release. It is a night for remembering our loved ones - please join us.

In closing, I have some great news. Doris Hancock, a passionate and dedicated victims' advocate, will be retiring from the Attorney General's Office (I am sure it must be an "early retirement" as she can't be that old). Doris will be bringing her wealth of experience and compassion for victims to State VOCAL where she will be Project Director and Office Manager. Welcome Doris! Hurry up and get here!

CHAPTER NEWS

CENTRAL ALABAMA CHAPTER

Chapter members attended a meeting of the Alabama Prison Reform Task Force on January 29 at the Alabama Therapeutic Education Facility in Columbiana. The principles discussed included lowering recidivism by strengthening community supervision, increasing accountability by responding swiftly to supervision violations, averting costs by reducing prison overcrowding, increasing public safety through structuring sentencing and parole to require post-release supervision, and addressing the needs of crime victims by improving victim notification.

The chapter is working with SafeHouse of Shelby County to plan our event to commemorate National Crime Victims' Rights Week. The program will be held on Monday, April 20, at the Pelham Civic Center (500 Amphitheater Road, Pelham). It will begin at 5:30 p.m. with networking and community information booths, providing information about victim service providers in Shelby County. Dinner service will begin at 6, the presentations and awards at 6:30, and the candlelight vigil at 7:30. Speakers for the event will address the far-reaching and devastating effects of domestic violence and homicide. Dinner will be sponsored by Nino's Italian in Pelham. Attendance is free, but reservations are required. Visit www.safehouse.org or call 205-669-1877 to reserve your ticket for the event.

Please contact President Mitzie Wheat at 205-668-0636 or mwheat@bellsouth.net if you wish to place a tribute and photo in the program or have a cross made for a victim.

Our next meeting will be held on Saturday, April 11, at 2 p.m. at the Owens House in Columbiana.

GULF COAST CHAPTER

The VOCAL Gulf Coast Chapter is in full swing planning for this year's Candlelight Vigil on the Delta to be held on April 30, at the 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center (<http://www.outdooralabama.com/5-rivers-alabamas-delta-resource-center>). It is looking to be another amazing event, which will be set along the waters of the Delta with candles lit while victim survivors tell stories of their loved ones tragically lost to violence, with the sun setting on the water's edge. This event is sponsored by our Baldwin County District Attorney Hallie Dixon and partnered with VOCAL Gulf Coast, CARE House and Lighthouse. We proudly work together as a "Team" for victims of Baldwin County. We ask that you mark your calendar and join us on April 30. I promise it will be worth your time and the drive. We would love for members of "sister" chapters to attend. Just let us know.

At our February meeting, DA Investigator Fred King was kind enough to give us updates on recent and upcoming cases. Members Tray Murphy (dad) and Lucy Murphy's (grandmother) case involving the murder of Teela Murphy is set for March 16. Little Teela was just five years old when she was gunned down in 2012 in Fairhope.

Victims of Crime and Leniency (VOCAL) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization which was established in 1982. VOCAL is an advocacy group for victims' rights consisting of concerned citizens, victims of crime and their families, law enforcement officers, attorneys, and others interested in reducing crime and improving the plight of its victims.

State Chapter

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Toll Free: 800-239-3219
Fax: 334-834-5645
Email: jgrantham@vocalonline.org
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 4449
 Montgomery, Alabama 36103

Central Alabama Chapter

Owens House, Columbiana, 2 pm, 2nd
 Saturday-Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec
President: Mitzie Wheat
Phone: 205-668-0636
Email: mwheat@bellsouth.net
Mailing Address: 35124 Hwy. 31
 Calera, Alabama 35040

East Alabama Chapter

President: Diane Walden
Email: vsodianewalden@yahoo.com
Mailing Address: P. O. Box 31
 Lafayette, AL 36862

Gulf Coast Chapter

Baldwin County Annex, 22251 Palmer
 Street, Robertsedale, 2nd Thursday, 6 pm
President: Tracey Wilson Goens
Phone: 251-533-6832
Email: t.goens@mchsi.com
Mailing Address: 30379 Maury Court
 Spanish Fort, Alabama 36527

Jefferson County Chapter

2200 8th Avenue North, Birmingham
 Sheriff's Dept. Training Rm., 2nd Floor
 1st Thursday, 6 p.m.
President: Carol Melton
Phone: 205-841-1465
Email: carolmeltonb@bellsouth.net
Mailing Address: 4162 51st Ave. N
 Birmingham, Alabama 35217

Mt Cheaha Chapter

25 West 11th Street, Bottom Floor
 Every other month, 2nd Monday, 5:30 pm
Interim President: Carrie Leland
Email: carrie.leland@alabamada.gov
www.facebook.com/MtCheahaVOCAL

River Region Chapter

Domino's Pizza, 5338 Atlanta Hwy.
Montgomery (across from Faulkner U)
2nd Mondays, 5:30 p.m.

President: Darlene Hutchinson Biehl

Phone: 334-450-5851

Email: DFWeditor@aol.com

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 240624
Montgomery, Alabama 36124

Shoals Chapter

Florence Lauderdale Public Library
350 N. Wood Ave., Florence
2nd Tuesday monthly, 5 p.m.

Chapter Contact: Mary Anne Rippey

Phone: 256-648-6163

Email: marippey56@gmail.com

Mailing Address: 634 Lion Drive
Killen, Alabama 35645

Facebook: VOCAL Shoals Chapter

Southeast Chapter

Wiregrass Angel House
105 North Bell, Dothan, Alabama
3rd Tuesday monthly, 6 p.m.

President: Beckie Schuler

Phone: 334-791-3969

Email: becca82380@live.com

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 354
Pinckard, Alabama 36371

The *VOCAL Newsletter* is published bi-monthly in January, March, May, July, September, and November by Victims of Crime and Leniency. Annual membership dues include subscription. Send news items to Editor Mitzie Wheat at mwheat@bellsouth.net.

GULF COAST CHAPTER continued

Please join us as we will be holding that family close in our hearts and pray for the wisdom of jury members as they are given the tragic details of the murder of this little child.

We are excited to have two of our chapter members who are published authors. Over the next few newsletters we will be including excerpts from their respective books. The following quote is from "In the Shelter of the Oak" by Barbara Colvin, M.S.C.P.

How do you find the strength to keep standing when tragedies explode around you as if you walked through a field of land mines? One minute can be spent out in the open and seeing a way forward when, with the next step, comes KABOOM! Whatever hope of moving forward in that direction just explodes.

Barbara's story is one of inspiration after multiple tragedies, and yet she has found her footing by helping and shining her light for others. If you would like to contact Barbara, her email address is Myjourneytoo@yahoo.com.

In the next newsletter I will highlight author Carol Fisher who details the day she learned of her daughter Wendy's murder in her book "That Day."

The chapter is trying to put together a bowling night, but we think due to the cold winter, folks just are not interested in getting out yet. We hope to do that fun event soon.

Stay tuned for more details and information on VOCAL Gulf Coast. We will be asking for volunteers to help with the vigil. So if you are interested, please contact Chapter President Tracey Goens at 251-533-6832. Our next chapter meeting will be March 12 at 6 p.m. at the Baldwin County Annex on Palmer Street in Robertsdale. We ask you to continue to pray for all the victims, no matter where they are located - that they find help, that they find kindness, that they find answers and that they find God.

MT. CHEAHA CHAPTER

The next chapter meeting will be held on Monday, March 30, at 6 p.m. at the St Clair County Courthouse in Pell City. Darlene Hutchinson Biehl will speak about Prison Reform Legislation and the victim notification enhancements which are part of that reform. Our candlelight vigil will be held on April 23 at 6:30 p.m. in front of the St. Clair County Courthouse in Pell City.

RIVER REGION CHAPTER

On February 11, parole was denied for the three inmates involved in a two-county shooting spree that occurred in December 1991 and changed the lives of many people forever. Julia Lindsey was murdered that night, and the criminals also attempted to kill at least three others. Many of our chapter members recall that horrific night and how the city was nearly paralyzed for a week until the suspects were arrested. The next parole hearings for inmates Benjamin Oryang, McArthur Harris and Tyrone Gibson have been set for 2020. We were thrilled to have the District Attorneys for both Montgomery County (Daryl Bailey) and the 19th Circuit (Randall Houston) at the parole hearings. Also, the testimony of Mike Thomas was quite compelling; he was the Montgomery PD case agent and at the scene the night of the shootings, and has recently been hired to work in the Montgomery DA's office. We truly appreciate public officials who take time from their busy schedules to keep violent offenders off our streets.

In recent weeks, our thoughts and prayers have been with the family of Chapter Vice President Lester Ezekiel, whose mother passed away in February. Lelia Ezekiel and her husband owned and operated a store

RIVER REGION CHAPTER continued

near Sylacauga, where she was the victim of a robbery and assault in the 1970s. She survived many stab wounds and great emotional trauma, which has motivated Lester over the years to help other victims. We pray that God continues to comfort this precious family.

Being so close to the Capital City, our chapter members have been closely watching the progress of the Prison Reform Task Force and what is being proposed to the Legislature, as it will have a significant impact on the entire criminal justice system. One of our local lawmakers, Representative Mike Holmes (of Elmore County), serves on the Task Force and has been interested in the feedback of crime victims throughout the eight-month process (thank you, Representative Holmes!). The Legislature went into Session on March 3, and SB67 has been introduced, which addresses prison overcrowding and other reforms to the justice system. Our members spend many volunteer hours at the State House and will be monitoring legislation that might affect victims.

Also, it appears that the completion and expansion of the Victim Notification System will be a key component of the “prison reform” efforts happening in the Legislature this spring. Whenever we have talked with those leading the reform efforts, we have emphasized that victims need to be notified and involved throughout the criminal proceedings. The automated Victim Notification System (AlabamaCAN) is still in development, even though the website launched last October. The next quarterly AlabamaCAN meeting will be March 27 in Montgomery and is open to the public.

In recent weeks to help publicize VOCAL locally, Chapter President Darlene Hutchinson Biehl and Vice President Lester Ezekiel have attended the CrimeStoppers annual luncheon and the Mayor’s banquet for neighborhood associations which attracted 200+ citizen-leaders.

Our chapter meetings continue to be a good cross-section of victims who have suffered terrible tragedies – some just recently, others two decades ago – each supporting one another, offering encouragement and being effective advocates for others. And providing tangible services to crime victims is very important to our chapter members. Our next meetings will be Monday, April 13 and May 11 at 5:30 p.m. at the Domino’s on Atlanta Highway (across from Faulkner University). Please join us!

SHOALS CHAPTER

Shoals Chapter has a new meeting place and time. In January we held our meeting at 5 p.m. at the Florence Lauderdale Public Library in Florence. The meeting was attended well by members. In February we had a guest counselor facilitate a grief support group as part of our meeting. Some people that we have not seen for a while and some new faces turned out for the support group. Our chapter is looking at organizing a support group on a monthly basis outside of our regular monthly meeting so that we can better assist families in crisis.

Chapter members were in court with the Letsinger, Stoner, Strickland and Rutland families for hearings. Court dates were set in some of these cases. Each of the offenders entered a “not guilty” plea. The Rutland family has a trial date set for September. Please check our FB page for more information on these cases.

Chapter members attended several parole hearings. Reginald Langham was denied parole for 3 years. He is serving a 20-year sentence for the murder of Tetris Robinson in 2008. Jerry O’Neal Pounders was denied parole; next date will be 2018. He has served 36 years of a life sentence for the murder of John Gilchrest. Ricky Dale King will complete his 20-year sentence after being denied parole for the rape of a child under the age of 12.

We are still tracking information on the Prison Reform Task Force and are anxiously awaiting the introduction of the legislation in March. Our chapter would like to thank all members of VOCAL that have taken the time to attend meetings, especially Darlene Hutchinson Biehl who has spent a lot of time going over what has been presented to help us all better understand all the graphs, charts and numbers.

We want to thank Janette Grantham for organizing the meeting in January at the Department of Corrections; it was a very informative meeting and was attended well by VOCAL members.

We continue to make plans for our annual candlelight vigil which will be held on Tuesday, April 21, at 7 p.m. at Wilson Park in Florence. Please continue to pray for member Johnnie Kimbrel as she continues in her recovery.

SOUTHEAST CHAPTER

The annual Wiregrass Vigil will be held Sunday, April 19, at First Presbyterian Church in Dothan at 3 p.m. A memorial slide show will be presented to honor the victims in the wiregrass area. Special guest speaker will be Houston County Sheriff Donald Valenza. If you would like to place a memorial in the booklet, please contact President Beckie Schuler at 334-791-3969.



National Crime Victims' Rights Week offers the opportunity to focus on the challenges faced by crime victims and to emphasize the ongoing struggle to establish victims' rights. This year's theme focuses on the role communities play providing victims with the support they need to pursue justice and recovery. Engaging communities and empowering victims takes resources, dedication, and persistence to establish a welcoming, compassionate, and supportive environment for all victims to share their stories.

Those who provide services to crime victims in Alabama certainly have their work cut out for them. Violent crimes in Alabama in 2013 included 342 homicides; 1,978 rapes; 4,513 robberies; and 13,389 aggravated assaults. Please join VOCAL chapters across the state to honor and remember victims of crime and to show appreciation to those who work tirelessly advocating for victims.

State Chapter	Friday, April 24 Lawn of the Attorney General's Office Montgomery	6:00 p.m.
Central Alabama	Monday, April 20 Pelham Civic Center, Pelham	5:30 Information Sharing 6:00 Dinner 6:30 Program 7:30 Candlelight Vigil
Gulf Coast	Thursday, April 30 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, Spanish Fort	6:00 p.m.
Mt. Cheaha	Thursday, April 23 In front of St. Clair County Courthouse Pell City	6:30 p.m.
Shoals	Tuesday, April 21 Wilson Park, Florence	7:00 p.m.
Southeast	Sunday, April 19 First Presbyterian Church, Dothan	3:00 p.m.

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

Time is defined as “an indefinite and continuous duration in which events succeed one another.” Time is something that is hard for victims to accept because all they are thinking about is that it took no time for their loved ones to be taken away, so it shouldn't take time for the perpetrator to be put away. As days, weeks, months, and years pass the victim's family is becoming more and more upset with the judicial system and everyone involved with their situation because they don't feel as if their loved one is getting justice in the time frame that “they” feel it should have been handled. There is a process in everything in life, including crime. For example, if you are in line at a grocery store and there are 15 people ahead of you no matter how mad or angry you get, no matter how much you wish to be at the front of the line you still have to wait until those 15 people are processed out before it's your turn. Just like with crime cases - there are others that are in your same shoes waiting for justice to be served for a crime that may have happened years before yours. Patience is going to play a major role in the lives of victims as the days, weeks, months, and sometimes years may pass. But while you are being patient, take the time to remember your love ones and properly grieve, but rest assured that your family is not forgotten and justice will be served. A great opportunity for you to remember your loved one is VOCAL's annual candlelight vigil which will be held on the lawn of the Attorney General's Office on the corner of Bainbridge and Dexter on April 24 at 6 p.m. If you wish to attend and participate, please contact us for more information.

L'Teisha S. Holloway, Counselor

12TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE – LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

Tuesday, April 21, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Embassy Suites, 200 Tallapoosa Street, Montgomery 36104

The 12th annual law enforcement conference, hosted by Wiregrass Angel House and VOCAL, promises excellent training for law enforcement. Participants will receive CEU's from P.O.S.T., and scholarships are available. The State Awards will be presented at the luncheon.

Glenn Bard will speak on “Cell Phone Technology and the Use of Social Media for Evidence Collection.” Mr. Bard is a retired Pennsylvania State Trooper First Class and U.S. Veteran of Operation Desert Storm. In 1999, he began computer crime investigations for the PA State Police and has since investigated crimes across the United States, ranging from child pornography to criminal homicide. Mr. Bard has also conducted forensic examinations for city, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. He has been certified as an expert in Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas and the U.S. Federal Court System in the area of digital forensics, cellular technology, and computer technology. He has also been certified as an expert instructor in the State of Maryland.

Speaking on “Lessons Learned from the Ariel Castro Case and the Cleveland Three” will be Saleh Awadallah. Mr. Awadallah has been an attorney since 1994 and joined the prosecutor's office in 1998. He currently oversees the Major Trial Unit. He is responsible for the intake, charging, supervision, and assignment of all homicide, including capital murder, cases and felony sexual assault and child abuse cases in Cuyhoga County. Mr. Awadallah has lectured and presented for the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office, the National Institute of Trial Advocacy, and the Medical Examiner's Office. He has also been a guest speaker at John Carroll University and for the Cleveland Police Department. He has first-chaired numerous jury trials and has argued before the Eighth District Court of Appeals and the Ohio Supreme Court. In 2011, Mr. Awadallah received the Prosecutor of the Year Award.

CANDLELIGHT VIGIL VICTIM'S TESTIMONIAL

VOCAL will produce a testimonial booklet for the Candlelight Vigil to be held on Friday, April 24, 2015 in Montgomery during National Crime Victims' Rights Week. If you wish to include a brief memorial or tribute statement in this booklet, complete the following form and mail or fax to the VOCAL office by **April 3, 2015**. Victim photos can also be mailed or emailed.

PLEASE PRINT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO VICTIM: _____

IN **MEMORY/HONOR** OF _____ WHO WAS
(CIRCLE ONE) (NAME OF VICTIM)

_____ ON _____
(NATURE OF VICTIMIZATION) (MONTH/DAY/YEAR)

BRIEF MEMORIAL OR TRIBUTE STATEMENT YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE INCLUDED IN THE TESTIMONIAL BOOKLET:

WILL YOU ATTEND THE CANDLELIGHT VIGIL IN MONTGOMERY ON 4/24/15? _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO:
VICTIMS OF CRIME AND LENIENCY
P. O. BOX 4449
MONTGOMERY, AL 36103-4449
Fax 1-334-834-5645

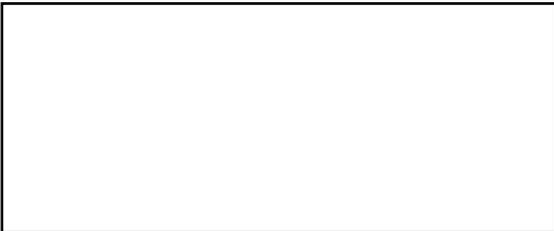
Email: lholloway@vocalon.org (Counselor L'Teisha Holloway)

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VOCAL appreciates the faithful contributors who support our efforts in assisting crime victims. Your donations make it possible for us to provide more support to victims and are tax deductible.

In Memory of Jason Buckelew
 Frank Gitchier III

In Memory of Jon Shehane
 Miriam Shehane

In Memory of Gerald Penn, Sr.
 Gerald Penn

In Memory of Quenette Shehane
 Curtis & Peggy Eiland

Gerald Helms
 Miriam Shehane

In Memory of Ben Reeves, Sr.
 Miriam Shehane

In Memory of Chris Smith
 George Smith

<p>VICTIM CONTACTS</p> <p>Governor Robert Bentley State Capitol Montgomery, AL 36130</p> <p>Taylor Vice, Director Constituent Services</p> <p>334-242-7100 1-800-591-4217</p>	<p>Attorney General's Office of Victim Assistance</p> <p>501 Washington Avenue Montgomery, AL 36130</p> <p>Patricia S. DeBortoli Victim Services Director</p> <p>334-242-7300 1-800-626-7676 www.ago.state.al.us</p>	<p>Department of Corrections Kim T. Thomas, Commissioner P.O. Box 301501 301 South Ripley Street Montgomery, AL 36130</p> <p>Stephanie Hust Victim/Constituent Services</p> <p>334-353-3871 www.doc.state.al.us State inmate parole info. 1-888-726-9799, Option 4</p>	<p>Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission</p> <p>Dr. Cassie Jones Director</p> <p>P.O. Box 231267 Montgomery, AL 36123</p> <p>1-800-541-9388 www.acvcc.state.al.us</p>	<p>State of Alabama Board of Pardons & Paroles Cynthia Dillard, Director P.O. Box 302405 Montgomery, AL 36130-2405</p> <p>Debra Bonds Victim Services Rep.</p> <p>334-242-8050 Fax 334-353-7701 www.pardoles.state.al.us</p>
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