

# VICTIMS OF CRIME AND LENIENCY

422 South Court Street

P.O. Box 4449

Montgomery, Alabama 36103

## VOCAL NEWSLETTER

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May 2015



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### A NOTE FROM STATE DIRECTOR, JANETTE GRANTHAM

Nobody thought it would pass, but it did. The Prison Reform Senate Bill 67 passed with little opposition. Since then there have been many negative comments. I guess some people just do not listen. Senator Cam Ward said it was a beginning – not an end. It was a strong beginning, and victims were well represented. Their voice was heard. Senator Ward and Council of State Government (CSG) were very considerate of victims. Is it all I had hoped for? Of course not. It is a beginning, and the bill is favorable to victims of violent crimes. Governor Bentley held a ceremonial signing of the bill on May 21. As a member of the Prison Reform Task Force, hopefully all our work will not be vain.

All the VOCAL Chapters and members did a tremendous job with the vigils. State VOCAL traveled all over the state and tried to attend as many vigils as we could.

The 2015 State Vigil was held on Friday, April 24, and was attended by the largest crowd ever. Chief Deputy Sheriff Kevin Murphy welcomed everyone to the vigil and Valorie Lawson served as mistress of ceremonies. Trudie Mallard sang the National Anthem and AAG Stephanie Billingslea gave the invocation. The keynote speaker was Senator Cam Ward. A tribute to victims was followed by candle lighting and release of balloons. It is good that we had a large turnout, but it is sad why all of us were there. Everything was planned and going well until I thought it was going to rain, then we tried to move inside and everything became chaos. There were so many of us, we could not all get in the room. Of course it did not rain, so I had a panic attack too soon. Thanks to everyone who helped out! Special thanks to Barbara and Tim at Neighbors in Christ! And a big thanks to Attorney General Luther Strange for his support.



On The Case With Paula Zahn aired on Sunday, May 17, on the ID Network and featured the Quenette Shehane case. Thanks to all of you who have called or sent messages to Miriam. Please keep Miriam and her family in your prayers as it is a difficult time for them.

## CHAPTER NEWS

### CENTRAL ALABAMA CHAPTER

Our program and candlelight vigil for National Crime Victims' Rights Week was held on Monday, April 20, at the Pelham Civic Complex and was a cooperative effort between our chapter and SafeHouse of Shelby County. A



Nino's Italian in Pelham sponsored dinner and Sarah's Flowers in Pelham provided the floral arrangements.

Speakers included Gerri Budgick King, Tahiera Monique Brown, and Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange. Gerri Budgick King witnessed the murder of her husband 18 years ago; and the perpetrator also turned on Gerri. Her story is about survival; about living beyond being a victim. Tahiera Monique Brown shared her incredible story of overcoming a lifetime of abuse and turning tragedy into victory. Tahiera experienced abuse as a child and as an adult she was held captive with her family for two years. Both are passionate and inspiring speakers who use their traumatic experiences to advocate for homicide and domestic violence awareness. Attorney General Strange spoke of his dedication to justice for victims of crime and expressed his gratitude to those who serve victims.

Janette Grantham, Executive Director of VOCAL, presented the annual "Voice for Victims" awards (pictured left to right): Citizen of the Year - Mitzie Wheat; Civic Leader - Gary Ivey, Mayor of the City of Hoover; Prosecutor of the Year - District Attorney Jill Lee, Shelby County; Law Enforcement Officer of the Year - Detective Brad Jordan, Pelham Police Department; and



VOCAL Volunteer - Mary Furline. Congratulations to the recipients; we appreciate your service to victims of crime.

Miriam Shehane, co-founder of VOCAL, began the candle lighting ceremony and families of victims followed,



acknowledging the victims they were there to remember by stating their names, lighting their candles, and placing a flower in a vase.

Chapter members attended a parole hearing on April 28 to protest parole for Phillip Hope. Hope is serving a life sentence for the murder of Lewie Earl Jones (brother of chapter member Evaughn Gould) in 1978. Parole was denied for three years.

Our next meeting will be held on Saturday, June 13, at 2 p.m. at the Owens House in Columbiana.



**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

**Director:** Janette Grantham  
**Physical Address:** 422 S. Court Street  
 Montgomery, Alabama  
**Phone:** 334-262-7197  
**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, 2<sup>nd</sup>  
 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, Robertsdale, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday, 6 pm  
**President:** Tracey Wilson Goens  
**Phone:** 251-533-6832  
**Email:** tgoens15@gmail.com  
**Mailing Address:** 30379 Maury Court  
 Spanish Fort, Alabama 36527

#### Jefferson County Chapter

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

#### Mt Cheaha Chapter

25 West 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Bottom Floor  
 Every other month, 2nd Monday, 5:30 pm  
**Interim President:** Carrie Leland  
**Email:** carrie.leland@alabamada.gov  
[www.facebook.com/MtCheahaVOCAL](http://www.facebook.com/MtCheahaVOCAL)

**River Region Chapter**

Domino's Pizza, 5338 Atlanta Hwy.  
Montgomery (across from Faulkner U)  
2<sup>nd</sup> 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  
2<sup>nd</sup> 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  
3<sup>rd</sup> 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](mailto:mwheat@bellsouth.net).

**GULF COAST CHAPTER**

Our 2015 Candlelight on the Delta was a big success. It was our fourth year honoring crime victims with over 150 in attendance. It is a special time to remember victims lost to crime. We come together to share, encourage, and



comfort each other. This year the Baldwin County District Attorney honored law enforcement officers who went above the call of duty assisting victims of crime with a special award - the Victims' Voice Award. The following were honored with this award:

Lisa Johnson with the Orange Beach Police Department and Donnie Payne with the Baldwin County Sheriff's Office.

A light meal was served while fellowshiping with each other. There were several community resources represented at the vigil: The Baldwin County District Attorney's office, Care House, Lighthouse, Grief Share, C.O.P.S. (Concerns of Police Survivors), Disaster and Victim Services International, along with VOCAL Gulf Coast.

VOCAL Gulf Coast has two members who have written books. The authors are Carol Fisher - "That Day" and Barbara Colvin - "In the Shelter of the Oak." Their books were available at the vigil.

Darlene Hutchinson Biehl was our guest speaker. She told her own story and provided information on the prison reform bill. Annie Morrison, a young victim sang a beautiful song, "I will see you again" by Carrie Underwood as well as our National Anthem. Baldwin County District Attorney Hallie Dixon spoke to the group and encouraged them, saying this is why she does what does; fighting for the victims - they have no voice. And she believes in doing the right thing.



The victims were able to come, speak and remember their loved ones lost to crime. There was a memory board where the pictures were displayed so everyone could see their faces. So sad to think they are gone. But this vigil helps each one of us be able to talk about them and heal in a small way. You could see how some of the previous victims were a little bit stronger and moving forward. This is what our vigil and VOCAL's purpose is - to help heal and help the victims be able to one day help another victim. Together we become stronger and know we are not alone on this journey. I want to thank everyone that made our candlelight vigil so special.



## MT. CHEAHA CHAPTER

Over 100 people attended the candlelight vigil held by Mt. Cheaha VOCAL on April 23 outside the St. Clair County Courthouse in Pell City. It was an emotional ceremony where loved ones of victims honored them by reading their names and lighting a candle in memory of the victim. Victims who survived their attacks also came to the podium to state their names and date of victimization and light a candle. Following a song played by musician Jamison Taylor, participants released white balloons and the crowd erupted in cheers. A catered reception followed immediately where attendees were served by the staff of the St. Clair County District Attorney's Office.

## SHOALS CHAPTER



Shoals Chapter held our annual candlelight vigil on Tuesday, April 21, at Wilson Park. Traveling from Montgomery to be our keynote speaker was Darlene Hutchinson Biehl, and we appreciate her being so generous with her time to do this for us. During the vigil, our chapter chose to honor three special individuals for going above and beyond when working for victims. Special recognition and a framed certificate were given to these three individuals for the work they do for victims: District Attorney Chris Connolly for his outstanding work for victims as a prosecutor; Deputy Chief Richard Richey recognized for his work with victims in Law Enforcement; and Darlene Hutchinson Biehl for her work with the legislature, volunteering and assisting victims.

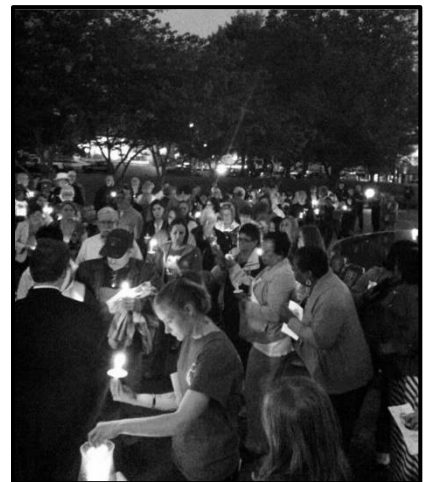


We would like to thank Janette Grantham, Doris Hancock, and Miriam Shehane for attending our vigil. Thanks also to District Attorney Chris Connolly, Tina Scott of Rape Response, Jerri Ragland of Safeplace, Kim Bevis of Cramer Center, and Kay Parker of Healing Place for speaking at our

vigil, along with Rev. David Harris and musician Trey Nichols for his musical talents. Our vigil would not have been possible without all of our members giving of their time and participating in this special event for our families.

Since March we have been in court with four victim's families: Lula Addison, Brioni Rutland, Joanna Strickland Butler, and Clo Ann Taylor Stoner. Ms. Addison's offender's trial will begin on Monday, May 18. Eugene Jones will be tried for murder, and our chapter along with the Lauderdale County DA's Office will be providing drinks, snacks and lunch for the family during trial week. Jeremy Williams is charged with capital murder for the brutal murder of Brioni Rutland, a trial date has not been set. Mark Montgomery is charged with the capital murder of Joanna Strickland Butler and Clo Ann Taylor Stoner. Judge Self recused himself last week and Judge Mike Jones will preside; no trial date has been set.

We have not attended a parole hearing in Montgomery since March, but we are always sending letters of protest when notified. We do have several parole hearings coming up in June and July. Mary Anne Rippey traveled to Montgomery to speak with legislators about prison reform. We are pleased to report the majority of our area delegation has been responsive to our concerns with the proposed changes.



## COUNSELOR'S CORNER

Letting Go! Often families have a hard time letting go of their loved ones who have died, but from my experience the phrase "letting go" has not been explained correctly. Letting go can mean so many different things depending upon the situation. When victims hear the phrase "let go" they immediately think that they are being asked to let go, forget about their loved ones, and move on. From my experience, "letting go" simply means to free your emotions and heart from the pain you're enduring. Of course that is easier said than done, but this is possible with time and help. You are simply attempting to face reality and learning to live again after a major life-altering event has taken place. Victims will forever have a missing piece of their heart, but by grieving properly they will find the joys in life again. On April 24, 2015 we held our annual Candlelight Vigil downtown and the turnout was outstanding. There were so many families there to remember their loved ones and to support those victims. For some victims it was uplifting to see others that understood their pain and for others it was hard because they still can't believe their loved ones are gone. As bad as it hurts, victims must cling to hope and know that it will get better by and by. VOCAL is always available for counseling if it is needed, so do not hesitate to contact us for services.

L'Teisha S. Holloway, Counselor

### 12<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Angel House and VOCAL held their 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Governor's Conference on Tuesday, April 21, in Montgomery. Nearly 200 in attendance listened to Glenn Bard, a retired state trooper from Pennsylvania, speak about cell phone technology and how law enforcement can use it to collect evidence for prosecution. Saleh Awadallah and Andy Harasimchuk presented "The Cleveland Three" and what the Cleveland Police Department and District Attorney's office learned from the ordeal.

An awards luncheon was held at noon, where Attorney General Luther Strange presented the following awards: Victim Service Officer of the Year – Arnetta Davis, Barbour/Bullock County DA's Office; Prosecutor of the Year - District Attorney Pamela Casey, Blount County; Law Enforcement Officer of the Year - Lt. Will Glover, Dothan Police Department; and The Miriam Shehane Award - District Attorney Ben Reeves, 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial Circuit.

Judge and Mrs. Pete Johnson and Miriam Shehane at League of Women Voters in Auburn on May 1.



## MEMBERSHIP FORM

*Complete the membership form and send it with your dues to your local chapter. If you do not have a local chapter, send form and dues to the state chapter at the address below.*

**VOCAL - Victims of Crime and Leniency, P.O. Box 4449, Montgomery, Alabama 36103** **2014 – 2015**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Agency or Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Office) \_\_\_\_\_ (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Victim's Name \_\_\_\_\_ My Relationship to Victim \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Crime \_\_\_\_\_ Nature of Crime \_\_\_\_\_

City and County of Crime (City) \_\_\_\_\_ (County) \_\_\_\_\_

Type Membership:     Regular \$25                       Agency/Organization \$50

Are you available and interested in volunteer work?    Yes    No

CIRCLE

CHAPTER:    Central AL    East AL    Gulf Coast    Jefferson    Mt. Cheaha    River Region    Shoals    Southeast

**VOCAL - Victims of Crime and Leniency**  
**The Quenette Shehane Counseling Center**  
 422 South Court Street, P.O. Box 4449  
 Montgomery, Alabama 36103

**Phone: 334-262-7197**  
**Toll Free: 800-239-3219**  
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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 Desta Dodson Byrd**  
 Ronnie & Vonciel Dodson

**In Memory of Lelia Ezekiel**  
 Miriam Shehane

**In Memory of Herman Huffstetler**  
 Miriam Shehane

**In Memory of Paul Little**  
 Doris Little

**In Memory of Jon Shehane**  
 Miriam Shehane

**In Memory of Chris Smith**  
 George Smith

**In Memory of Lee Storey**  
 Karen L. Storey

Geno Howton

<p><b>VICTIM CONTACTS</b></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        Jeff Dunn, Commissioner</p> <p>P.O. Box 301501        301 South Ripley Street        Montgomery, AL 36130</p> <p>334-353-3871        www.doc.state.al.us</p> <p>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 &amp; 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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