

VICTIMS OF CRIME AND LENIENCY

422 South Court Street

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Montgomery, Alabama 36103

VOCAL NEWSLETTER

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A NOTE FROM STATE DIRECTOR, JANETTE GRANTHAM

Strength – Resilience – Justice - is the theme of National Crime Victims' Rights Week - April 2-8, 2017. Friday night, April 7, State VOCAL will stand with victims across the state of Alabama as we all share the memories of our loved ones and honor those who battle the court system seeking justice for crime victims. Please join us. The keynote speaker will be Robert Longshore. Mr. Longshore is a gifted speaker and has wealth of knowledge regarding the judicial system, both state and federal. VOCAL Chapters across the state will be having Candlelight Vigils all week. Be sure to check out the dates and times of the all vigils listed in this newsletter. Candlelight vigils are bitter sweet for families of homicide victims.

Many years ago when I worked at the AGO, I attended many trials with Peggy Jones, who like me, had lost a brother to a vicious murderer. Peggy showed **Strength** in attending each trial and all hearings for over 36 years. Peggy showed **Resilience** each time a stay was given – a total of 7 stays. Peggy was a tower of strength as she was determined her brother, Troy Wicker, would one day receive the **Justice** he richly deserved. On the 7th execution date last November, Peggy was unable to travel to Holman for the execution as she was fighting for her life against a killer disease. She sat by her phone into the middle of the night praying that justice would finally be served. Again it was not. He escaped his punishment one more time. Unfortunately, there will not be a next time for Peggy for she died a couple of weeks ago of breast cancer. She died not knowing if the murderer of her brother would ever be held accountable for his crime. Peggy was one of the most courageous and heroic women I have ever known.

On January 10, DA Doug Valeska, along with DA Patrick Jones, protested the parole of the inmate who murdered Gwendolyn Brock, the daughter of long-time VOCAL member, Bertha Davis. DA Valeska gave a passionate protest against the early release of this murderer. The inmate was denied for five years.

Since the beginning of May, numerous violent offenders have been paroled. An inmate paroled in May committed murder in February. He received a total of 80 years concurrent with a 30-year controlling sentence for Robbery 1 and Burglary 1. He served less than ten years. He was paroled in May 2016 and was arrested in January for murder. Another inmate was sentenced in 1996 and paroled after serving less than 5 years. His parole was revoked, and he went back to prison after he committed a couple new crimes in 2009. He was paroled again in August 2016. Just eight days after being paroled (for the 2nd time), he was arrested for Enticing a Child (less than 12 years old) for Immoral Proposes. There two young victims. His parole was not revoked so he was bailed out of jail. In February he was arrested for Rape, Sodomy, and Kidnapping in Butler County. He was also arrested for 3 counts of rape in Lowndes County. As a result of his parole in August, there are now

four new victims. Butler County Sheriff Kenny Harbin stated, "If the parole board had done their job, we would not have these four victims that we have now." All his previous crimes involved a weapon. Several sex offenders have been granted a full pardon which means they will **not** have to register. We have heard 20 sex offenders have been taken off the Sex Offender Registrar since May. We have been able to confirm this number. The increase in the release of violent offenders to include sex offenders is alarming. These inmates go back into our communities where their crimes are unknown to their neighbors. VOCAL rose up in alarm with the increased number of violent offenders being released. The Prison Reform bill stated violent offenders were not to be paroled to reduce prison overcrowding. I guess some folks did not read that part of the Prison Reform Bill. A new board member was appointed the first of May, after the retirement of Robert Longshore. Immediately the atmosphere in the hearing room changed and the release of violent offenders began. No compassion was shown to the victims of these violent offenders, and there was a disregard for safety in our communities with the release of so many violent offenders. If more attention to the seriousness of the crimes and the potential danger to our communities had been considered, these inmates would not have been released to rape and murder innocent victims. VOCAL is an organization of victims who advocate for all crime victims. We also advocate for safe communities by protesting the release of violent offenders. Lyn Head, former district attorney in Tuscaloosa, was recently confirmed to the parole board. The release of the two aforementioned violent offenders happened before her appointment to the parole board. In the last month, the release of violent offenders has declined. We hope the paroles of violent offenders are more closely scrutinized. Just because a violent offender is eligible for parole does not mean the inmate should be paroled. A new Pardon and Parole Board member will be appointed soon. VOCAL asks for the appointee to have knowledge of criminal law and sentences, compassion for victims, and be impartial. We pray violent offenders will not be paroled to reduce overcrowding. VOCAL received a back-lash for our stand against the release of these violent offenders. The accusers should get their facts straight. Thanks to all of you who understood our concerns and supported our cause. It took us all working together to accomplish our mission.

The legislature is in full force. Senator Brewbaker (SB16), Senator Sanders (SB18) and Representative England (HB32) are sponsors of the Judicial Override Bills. In SB16 by Senator Brewbaker, the judge override is both ways, and it has the same 10 to 2 requirement for the death penalty. Representative England's proposal changes the law to a unanimous vote for the death penalty. Of course, Senator Brewbaker's bill is more victim friendly, since it does not have the unanimous requirement.

VOCAL is growing. Under the new grant, our coverage area has increased by 35 counties to a coverage area of 59 counties. We now provide services to all crime victims, not just families of homicide victims. We will hire two more employees – a second counselor and a second court advocate.

Mark your calendar for Thursday, September 22nd – VOCAL's 7th Annual Charity Golf Tournament.

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.

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Central Alabama Chapter

Owens House, 22747 Hwy. 25
 Columbiana, 2 p.m., 2nd Saturdays in
 Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec
President: Mitzie Wheat
Phone: 205-283-9719
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: tgoens15@gmail.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

River Region Chapter

Chappy's Deli, Montgomery
 Perry Hill & Carmichael Roads
 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.
President: Patsy Michael
Phone: 256-777-0482
Email: patsymichael@charter.net
Mailing Address: 18443 Dement Rd.
 Athens, Alabama 35611
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

St. Clair Chapter

St. Clair Co. Courthouse, Suite 221
 1815 Cogswell Ave., Pell City
 Bi-monthly 6 p.m.
President: June Hodges
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 Pell City, AL 35124
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CHAPTER NEWS**CENTRAL ALABAMA CHAPTER**

The Central Alabama Chapter will collaborate with SafeHouse of Shelby County and the Shelby County District Attorney's office to commemorate National Crime Victims' Rights Week with a program and vigil on Monday, April 3, beginning at 6 p.m. at the Pelham Civic Complex. The program will include speakers, awards presentations, and a candlelight vigil in memory of those who have lost their lives to crime. Attendance is free, and reservations are required. Reserve your seat at <http://advocateawards17.eventbrite.com>.

Our next meeting will be held on Saturday, June 10, at 2 p.m. at the Owens House in Columbiana (22747 Hwy. 25).

GULF COAST CHAPTER

The Gulf Coast Chapter will hold our annual Candle Light on the Delta on Thursday, April 6, at Delta Five Rivers in Spanish Fort (the same location as last year) from 6 to 8 p.m. Our new DA Bob Wilters is supporting this event to honor and remember crime victims during National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

RIVER REGION CHAPTER

With the Legislature going into session February 7, and our chapter's close proximity to Montgomery, many of our members are monitoring pending legislation to assure lawmakers always consider public safety and the needs and rights of victims. A few bills have caught our attention already, but it's still early and anything can happen. The Legislature will probably be in session until the end of May.

On February 15, chapter president Darlene Hutchinson Biehl, treasurer Brenda Roberts and Miriam Shehane were proud to stand in at a parole hearing for our longtime, dear friend Emily Landers, who was shot during a robbery in Mobile in 1996. Robert Allen was convicted of Attempted Murder & Robbery 1st and sentenced to life. A former resident of Montgomery, Emily has been in a wheelchair since the crime and now lives out of state. She was unable to travel to Alabama for the parole hearing. But with the assistance of Mobile County ADA Chris McDonough, the AG's office and Emily's VOCAL friends, the Parole Board decided to deny parole and set the next hearing for 2022.

On January 24, Miriam and Darlene accompanied longtime VOCAL member Annette Williams of Prattville and her family as they protested the parole of Donald Rigby who killed Annette's daughter Donna more than 25 years ago. After reviewing the inmate's file and hearing testimony, the Board denied parole and set the next hearing to occur in 5 years. We appreciate the assistance of DA Randall Houston's staff in standing with this victim's family.

Speaking of the District Attorney's office for the 19th Judicial Circuit (Autauga, Chilton & Elmore counties), we send our congratulations to Chief Deputy DA C.J. Robinson, who graduated from the Montgomery Police Academy in late February. Yes, you read that right. Apparently, C.J. is the first prosecutor to go through police academy training in Alabama. To get C.J. admitted to the academy, DA Randall Houston says they had to contact and/or get approvals from the State Bar, the Ethics Commission, and the AG's office. At 33 years old, C.J. said it was the 15 most challenging weeks of his life. He did thousands of push-ups and ran a bunch of miles, "but at the end of the day, learning what it's like, what officers go through and the training they go

RIVER REGION CHAPTER continued

through, I would never trade that for anything,” the Montgomery Advertiser reported. We are proud of you, C.J.!

Many of our members are very excited about the appointment of Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall and wish him well as he assumes this very complex job which includes enormous responsibilities. River Region VOCAL Chapter President Darlene Hutchinson Biehl was so honored to be asked by Mr. Marshall to speak at the press conference that introduced our new AG to the state of Alabama. Those of us who have known General Marshall for many years are certain he’s totally capable of meeting the challenges and that he will always stand with victims, fight tenaciously for justice, and serve with integrity.

Our chapter meets on 2nd Mondays each month at 5:30 p.m. at Chappy’s Deli (at the intersection of Perry Hill & Carmichael in Montgomery). We’re a fun and compassionate group from a variety of backgrounds, who have survived a wide range of crimes. We encourage one another and proactively work together, while seeking ways to deliver tangible services to crime victims, and enhance public safety. Our next meetings will be Monday, April 10 and May 8. Join us!

SHOALS CHAPTER

Plans are being made for National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. Shoals Chapter vigil will be held on Tuesday April 4, at 7 p.m. at Wilson Park in Florence.

Our chapter has provided support for families in Lauderdale County. After a long wait for justice, the Barnett family has some relief. Shannon Johnson was sentenced to life in prison in February 2017 for the death of their son, Keith Barnett. This murder took place in the year 2000 and was a cold case for many years. In 2013, Shawn Johnson, a brother to Shannon, was sentenced to life in prison for his part in the murder. This has been a long wait for the Barnett family, but they never gave up that the crime would be solved and justice would be served.

Nathan Boyd was convicted of the Capital Murder of Danny Sledge in 1999. A status hearing was held in February and another status hearing is scheduled for May 3, 2017. The defense has hired a mitigation expert and received a 500-page report on Nathan Boyd from the DOC. Defense attorneys told the judge they would not be prepared for re-sentencing by May 3. The status hearing will be held and hopefully he will be resentenced in June 2017. This is so hard for the Sledge family to have to go through again.

In Colbert County, members have been supportive of the family of Jason Fox. Erica Fox and Ronnie Credille were indicted for Capital Murder in the January Grand Jury after being arrested in August 2016 for the shooting death of Jason Fox. Jeremy Michael Credille, brother to Ronnie Credille, was arrested in January 2017 and also indicted for Capital Murder. Police say that Michael drove his brother Ronnie to a residence of Jason Fox and helped him get away after Jason was shot. Michael Credille’s arraignment will be held after representation is appointed. The arraignment for Erica Fox is scheduled for April 6, 2017; no date set for Ronnie Credille at this time.

Please continue pray for member Janice Bevis as she is undergoing cancer treatments at this time.

SOUTHEAST CHAPTER

The Southeast Chapter of VOCAL will hold their vigil on Sunday, April 2, at 3 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church in Dothan.

WALKER COUNTY

Walker County will hold a vigil on Tuesday, April 4, at 6 p.m. at the Jasper Civic Center. Kerri Kasem and Deborah Vance Bowie will speak. Kerri Kasem is the daughter of Casey Kasem of Americas Top 40 countdown fame. She has been a national advocate in the fight against elder abuse. Deborah is a victim that has spoken on the terrible situation that has impacted her life at many victim events. These are two dynamic speakers. We will have several musical groups in addition to the speakers. We look forward to seeing all of you again – DA Bill Adair.

MEET ALABAMA ATTORNEY GENERAL STEVE MARSHALL

In February, Gov. Robert Bentley appointed Steve Marshall as Alabama's new Attorney General – following the confirmation of Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General and Luther Strange's appointment to the U.S. Senate.

Previously, Steve Marshall served nearly 16 years as the District Attorney of Marshall County, is past president of the Alabama District Attorney's Association, and has been Alabama's representative to the National District Attorney's Association. Mr. Marshall is extremely well-respected among his peers and has always been a hands-on prosecutor, trying cases from DUIs to child molesters to murderers. Additionally, he has played a significant role advocating for legislation to protect families and secure justice for victims. In the past couple years, he's also become rather involved in the development of Alabama's "victim notification system," and he has helped create one of the most exemplary domestic violence programs in Alabama. Shortly after his appointment, the new AG said, "I will enforce the law fairly, I will stand up for victims, and I will do the hard work of attacking the underlying problems that threaten the safety of our communities."

In explaining the priorities of the AG's office in the months and years to come, Mr. Marshall said, "I've seen what Jeff Sessions did when he came here and established a foundation for greatness. But Bill Pryor was the gold standard of what this office ought to be, and that's where we're going to go. But I've seen what Troy King did with victims and his support of them, and we'll embrace that." "This place is home for law enforcement and victims, and we will be advocates for the issues they face," he added.

I was honored to be among five friends Steve asked to speak at a press conference shortly after his appointment. Having known and respected him for many years, I conveyed that "Steve Marshall understands the long-lasting effects crime has on a victim. I know he'll be vigilant and continue to achieve justice for victims – and I have no doubt he will do everything he can to hold offenders accountable. He is a man of the highest integrity."

State Senator Clay Scofield of Marshall County told those at the press conference about Steve Marshall's "servant heart," and said, "I can't wait for the people of Alabama to learn this is a man you can trust, you can believe, and you can count on to uphold our laws and to work for justice."

Former Shelby County Sheriff Chris Curry said Steve has a strong work ethic and great intellect, and that his integrity and character are unquestioned. Further, Sheriff Curry said the new Attorney General has the courage to face difficult problems, and noted that Steve's foundation is deeply rooted in his faith.

"The time spent working alongside law enforcement for the last 20 years has been a remarkable privilege," Steve said. "As Attorney General, a top priority will be to maintain an effective working relationship with sheriffs, district attorneys, police and investigators who are the front lines of public safety, and we will support them in every way possible."

A native of Atmore, Steve graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he received a distinguished service award given by the chancellor to the student who best exemplifies the spirit of unselfish service to the school and communities (even 30 years later, Steve is still the award's only two-time recipient). Our new Attorney General then graduated in the top 10 percent of his law school class at the University of Alabama. Steve says he wanted to be an attorney because he enjoyed the intellectual challenge of the law, and it would give him the opportunity to solve real problems in people's lives. Steve and his wife Bridgette are longtime residents of Albertville, along with their daughter Faith who is a college student. He is active with the local United Way and is an elder at Lifepoint Church; plus, Steve has a heart for mentoring and shaping the next generation.

General Marshall concluded his press conference telling the hundreds in attendance and thousands watching live on TV: "If you want to know what drives me, if you want to know what causes me to seek this job – it's that I have the opportunity to seek justice. A life verse for me is from Micah 6:8. It is truly how I see my life. I am to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with my God. That's my pledge to the people of this state."

Darlene Hutchinson Biehl

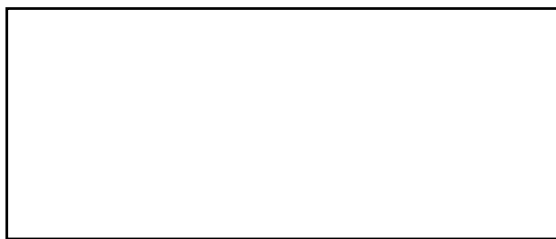


Darlene Hutchinson Biehl, president of the River Region VOCAL Chapter, was among the friends speaking at the press conference in February to introduce our new Attorney General Steve Marshall.

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★ ★ **NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK** ★ ★ **APRIL 2-8 ★ 2017** ★ ★

STRENGTH ★ RESILIENCE ★ JUSTICE

DONATIONS - 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.

District Attorney Pamela Casey
 41st Judicial Circuit

District Attorney Brandon Hughes
 37th Judicial Circuit

In Honor of My Friend Emily Landers
 Kathi Archer

In Memory of Edward Shehane
 Karen & Lee Story

In Memory of Chris Smith
 George Smith

<p>VICTIM CONTACTS</p> <p>Governor Robert Bentley State Capitol Montgomery, AL 36130</p> <p>Pam Bye, 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>Sarah Green, Director Constituent Services</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 & Paroles Phil Bryant, Exec. Director</p> <p>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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