



U.S. Sentencing Commission

One Columbus Circle NE
Washington, DC 20002-8002

www.ussc.gov
 @theusscgov

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Jeanne Doherty
Public Affairs Officer
(202) 502-4502

U.S. SENTENCING COMMISSION RELEASES VIDEO TO AID FEDERAL CRIME VICTIMS

Release Commemorates Tenth Anniversary of Crime Victims' Rights Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The United States Sentencing Commission today released a video entitled “Victims’ Rights and Federal Sentencing,” which aims to help crime victims exercise their right to participate in the sentencing process.

Federal crime victims have a right to participate in sentencing and throughout the criminal justice process pursuant to the Crime Victims’ Rights Act (CVRA), signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 30, 2004. The Commission is commemorating the tenth anniversary of the CVRA this week by releasing this new video to help victims make maximum use of the rights it ensured. The video and supporting resources are available on the Commission’s website, www.ussc.gov/videos/victims-rights-and-federal-sentencing.

“The Commission recognizes that victims are important participants in the criminal justice system, and we are committed to ensuring that they have the information they need to fully participate at sentencing,” said Chief Judge Patti Saris, Chair of the Commission.

The 23-minute video features key information about the sentencing process. It identifies courtroom participants, explains legal terminology, and demonstrates how victims benefit from participating. A crime victim also shares his personal story about speaking at sentencing, and a probation officer explains how victims can affect the sentencing outcome.

“Victims report that participating in the sentencing process can be a powerful part of their healing process,” said Russell Butler, chair of the Commission’s Victims Advisory Group and executive Director of the Maryland Crime Victims’ Resource Center. “It is an opportunity for the court and the defendant to hear from the victims regarding how they were harmed.”

Butler, a long-time victims' rights advocate and attorney, is featured in the video. He has served on the Victims Advisory Group since it was formed in 2008 to assist the Commission in considering the impact of sentencing policy decisions on crime victims.

The CVRA provides federal crime victims with certain rights, including the rights to receive information about their cases, to be heard at public hearings, to obtain restitution, and to be treated fairly and with respect for the victim's dignity and privacy. Pursuant to the CVRA, victims have the right to participate at sentencing by submitting a victim impact statement to be considered by the judge in imposing the sentence.

"Victims can be the best source of important information that can impact the sentence imposed," said Judge Saris. "I also know how meaningful it can be to a judge to hear how a crime personally affected the victim."

The full text of the CVRA can be found at the Government Printing Office website at <http://go.usa.gov/wCeW>.

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The United States Sentencing Commission, an independent agency in the judicial branch of the federal government, was organized in 1985 to develop a national sentencing policy for the federal courts. The resulting sentencing guidelines provide structure for the courts' sentencing discretion to help ensure that similar offenders who commit similar offenses receive similar sentences.