

# **PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON VICTIMS OF CRIME**

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**FINAL REPORT**

**DECEMBER 1982**

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# President's Task Force on Victims of Crime

The Honorable Ronald Reagan  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

When you established the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime on April 23, 1982, you led the nation into a new era in the treatment of victims of crime. Never before has any President recognized the plight of those forgotten by the criminal justice system—the innocent victims of crime.

In meeting the charge that you gave us, we reviewed the available literature on the subject of criminal victimization; we interviewed professionals, both in and out of the criminal justice system, who are responsible for serving victims; and, most importantly, we spoke with citizens from around the country whose lives have been altered by crime.

We found that the perception you shared when you gave us our charge is, unfortunately, true. The innocent victims of crime have been overlooked, their pleas for justice have gone unheeded, and their wounds—personal, emotional, and financial—have gone unattended.

We also found that there is no quick remedy to the innocent victim's plight. Only the sustained efforts of federal, state, and local governments, combined with the resources of the private sector, can restore balance to the criminal justice system.

Citizens from all over the nation told us again and again how heartened they were that this Administration has taken up the challenge, ignored by others in the past, of stopping the mistreatment and neglect of the innocent by those who take liberty for license and by the system of justice itself.

We are pleased to have been able to serve you on this Task Force. We thank you for giving us the privilege of doing

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so, and we stand ready to assist again should you call upon us in the future.

We have the honor to transmit herewith, pursuant to the provisions of your Executive Order No. 12360, our unanimous recommendations and final report of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime.

Very truly yours,



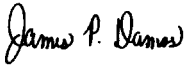
Lois Haight Herrington, *Chairman*



Garfield Bobo



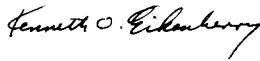
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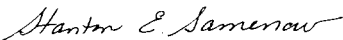
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## **Acknowledgments**

The President's Task Force on Victims of Crime wishes to acknowledge the many persons and organizations who assisted in this study and in the preparation of the final report to the President.

Most especially the Task Force wishes to express gratitude to those victims of crime who came forward, often at the risk of reprisal or embarrassment, to relive their tragedy so that others might learn from it.

We commend those who, despite suffering devastating losses at the hands of criminals, have dedicated their energies and resources to creating organizations to help other crime victims who might experience similar tragedies. Their initiative and strength served as an inspiration to us all.

We also thank Vice President George Bush, Attorney General William French Smith, Counselor to the President Edwin Meese III, the Honorable John Heinz, Senator from the State of Pennsylvania, and the Honorable Paul Laxalt, Senator from the State of Nevada, who gave us the benefit of their insight into this area and who were sources of constant support.

Finally, the Task Force acknowledges the assistance of countless dedicated and concerned citizens throughout the nation, and of the U.S. Marshals Service. We also wish to thank our Executive Director, Terry Russell, and his dedicated staff.

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# Statement of The Chairman

*If we take the justice out of the criminal justice system we leave behind a system that serves only the criminal.*

Something insidious has happened in America: crime has made victims of us all. Awareness of its danger affects the way we think, where we live, where we go, what we buy, how we raise our children, and the quality of our lives as we age. The specter of violent crime and the knowledge that, without warning, any person can be attacked or crippled, robbed, or killed, lurks at the fringes of consciousness. Every citizen of this country is more impoverished, less free, more fearful, and less safe, because of the ever-present threat of the criminal. Rather than alter a system that has proven itself incapable of dealing with crime, society has altered itself.

Every 23 minutes, someone is murdered. Every six minutes a woman is raped. While you read this Statement, two people will be robbed in this country and two more will be shot, stabbed, or seriously beaten. Yet to truly grasp the enormity of the problem those figures must be doubled, because more than 50 percent of violent crime goes unreported. The criminal knows that his risk of punishment is miniscule. A study of four major states revealed that only 9 percent of violent crimes reported were resolved with the perpetrator being incarcerated.

Victims who do survive their attack, and are brave enough to come forward, turn to their government expecting it to do what a good government should—protect the innocent. The American criminal justice system is absolutely dependent on these victims to cooperate. Without the cooperation of victims and witnesses in reporting and testifying about crime, it is impossible in a free society to hold criminals accountable. When victims come forward to perform this vital service, however, they find little protection. They discover instead that they will be treated as appendages of a system appallingly out of balance. They learn that somewhere along the way the system has lost track of the simple truth that it is supposed to be fair and to protect those who obey the law while punishing those who break it. Somewhere along the way, the system began to serve lawyers and judges and defendants, treating the victim with institutionalized disinterest.

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The President created this Task Force to address the needs of the millions of Americans and their families who are victimized by crime every year and who often carry its scars into the years to come. He recognized that in the past these victims have pleaded for justice and their pleas have gone unheeded. They have needed help and their needs have gone unattended. The neglect of crime victims is a national disgrace. The President is committed to ending that neglect and to restoring balance to the administration of justice.

This Statement is not followed by a section devoted to statistics. For decades we have been inundated by those grim numbers, yet crime continues to taunt and shatter lives with intolerable frequency. Nor will these remarks be immediately followed by practical proposals, as important as they are and as forcefully as they will be recommended later in this report. Instead, what follows next is a window into the victim's experience. The Task Force strongly urges you to read it before you go further. You cannot appreciate the victim problem if you approach it solely with your intellect. The intellect rebels.

The important proposals contained here will not be clear unless you first confront the human reality of victimization. Few are willing to do so. Unless you are, however, you will not be able to understand. During our hearings we were told by one eloquent witness, "It is hard not to turn away from victims. Their pain is discomfoting; their anger is sometimes embarrassing; their mutilations are upsetting." Victims are vital reminders of our own vulnerability. But one cannot turn away.

You must know what it is to have your life wrenched and broken, to realize that you will never really be the same. Then you must experience what it means to survive, only to be blamed and used and ignored by those you thought were there to help you. Only when you are willing to confront all these things will you understand what victimization means.

We who have served on this Task Force have been forever changed by the victims we have met, by the experiences they have shared, by the wisdom sprung from suffering that they imparted. What we heard from these forgotten citizens is the basis for the following section, which gives an overview of the variety of problems faced by victims at every stage of their experience. The problems we refer to unfortunately exist. They exist in every jurisdiction of the country. The examples used in this report to illustrate these problems are taken directly from victim testimony. While not every victim will face every one of these problems, our inquiry has shown that almost every victim will face some of them.

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The lessons of the victims run like a thread throughout and are the foundation of all the proposals that follow. Please take the time to learn, as we have, the depth and the human aspect of this grave social problem, then join in seeking and implementing the solutions.

Lois Haight Herrington  
Chairman

Washington, D.C.  
December 20, 1982