

Tips on Testifying

- Tell the truth.
- Never lose your temper.
- Emotions are natural. It's ok to get upset.
- Dress neatly and be courteous.
- Be on time and listen carefully. Make sure you understand each question that is asked before you answer.
- Arrange childcare if possible.
- Do not guess or make up answers.
- Speak in a clear, loud voice.

Referral Numbers

Sherriff's Office (757) 514-7840
Police (Non-Emergency)
(757) 923-2350
Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court
Clerk's Office (757) 514-7790
General District Court Clerk's Office
(757) 514-4822
Circuit Court Clerk's Office
(757) 514-7800
Department of Social Services
(757) 514-7450
Magistrate
(757) 514-4300
Court Services Unit
(757) 514-4311

Crisis Numbers

Genieve Shelter (757) 925-4365
Western Tidewater Community Service
Board (757) 942-1069
Virginia Victims' Fund
(800) 552-4007
National Domestic Violence Hotline
(800) 799-7233
Virginia Family Violence and Sexual
Assault Hotline (800) 838-8238
Victim Notification Program (NAAVI)
(800) 560-4292

Call 757.514.4366 after 5:00pm the day before you have to come to court. A recorded message will tell you if your case will be heard. By calling this number, you may save yourself an unnecessary trip to court.

OFFICE OF THE COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY CITY OF SUFFOLK VICTIM/WITNESS SERVICES

Godwin Courts Building
150 N. Main St.
Suffolk, Virginia 23434

Phone: 757.514.4365
Fax: 757.514.4600

AN INFORMATION AND SERVICES GUIDE FOR CRIME VICTIMS AND WITNESSES

NARENDRA R. PLEAS COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY



Victim/Witness Services and After Hours
Docket Line Information
757-514-4366

Narendra R. Pleas Commonwealth's Attorney



As a victim or witness in a crime, we understand you will have many questions and need assistance to navigate this unfamiliar process. Rest assured that we are here to help.

As your Commonwealth's Attorney, I promise that my office will handle your case in a professional, ethical, and courteous manner; ensuring that we are seeking justice at every turn. However, we need you to help us. Speak with the police and other law enforcement officials to make our case complete, come to court, testify honestly. We cannot do this alone.

We all have a duty to keep our family and community safe. If we work together, we can achieve this goal.

Thank you for allowing us to serve you.

Introduction

Suffolk Victim/Witness Services, located in the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney, helps ensure that crime victims and witnesses receive fair and compassionate treatment while participating in the criminal justice system. As a victim or witness, your role is an important one.

However, the responsibilities involved may be unfamiliar to you. This brochure is designed to acquaint you with the steps involved in bringing a case to trial and your role in the process. It also describes your rights as a victim or witness, and the services available to you. Our goal is, that by working together, we can make Suffolk a safer community with less crime.

Rights of Crime Victims and Witnesses

- To be informed of their rights
- To be treated with dignity, respect, and sensitivity and that their rights are protected
- To have the opportunity to be heard at all critical stages of the criminal justice process
- Ability to make the courts aware of the full impact of the crime through the use of a Victim Impact Statement or testimony at the sentencing stage
- Ability to keep certain information confidential
- Compensation for travel may be available to victims and witnesses traveling from out of town who are subpoenaed by the Commonwealth. This may include payment for mileage, lodging, meals and airfare for each day's attendance in court
- Restitution may be ordered if money is owed back to you as a result of the crime under certain circumstances

If you are being threatened by a defendant or witness in a case, that is a crime in Virginia. Please let law enforcement and the Victim/Witness Program know immediately.

TERMS USED

Victim – a person who suffers physical, psychological, or economic harm as a result of a crime

Defendant – the person that has been charged with a crime

Witness – a person that witnesses a crime being committed

Misdemeanor – a less serious crime punishable by confinement in jail for a maximum of twelve months, or a fine of \$2,500.00, or both

Felony – a serious crime punishable by possible imprisonment for a minimum of one year or more

Subpoena – a court order directing you to be present at the time and place stated

Arraignment – a hearing in which a defendant is formally charged and, in felony cases, a plea is entered

Bond Hearing – a hearing where a judge determines whether a defendant will receive bail while a case is pending

Continuance – the postponement of a hearing to a later date

Probable Cause – reasonable grounds to believe a crime has been committed and that the person charged committed the crime

Preliminary Hearing – a hearing in lower court where a judge decides whether there is probable cause to believe the crime was likely committed

Grand Jury – a random selection of citizens whose duty is to hear the Commonwealth evidence and decide if a trial should be held in Circuit Court

Trial – where victims and witnesses testify and evidence is presented before a judge or jury and a verdict of not guilty or guilty beyond a reasonable doubt is reached

Plea Agreement – an agreement between the Commonwealth and defendant as to the charges the defendant will plead guilty to and, in some cases, the sentence the defendant will receive

Pre-Sentence Report – background investigation on the defendant that the judge reviews before imposing a sentence

General District Court – the lower court in which most preliminary hearings take place

Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court – the lower court in which handles traffic and criminal violations by juveniles and family violence crimes

Circuit Court – a court of record where the actual criminal trial takes place



Virginia Victim's Fund (VVF)

Innocent victims of violent crime, or their survivors, may be eligible for financial compensation to cover out of pocket medical expenses, mental health counseling, prescriptions, lost wages, funeral expenses, and many other expenses. Expenses covered by insurance and loss of personal property are **not** covered by VVF. Claims typically have to be filed no later than one year after the crime or death of a victim. Claims can be filed electronically or by mail. If you think you may be eligible contact the Suffolk Victim/Witness Program or the Virginia Victims Fund at 1 (800) 552-4007.

Victim Witness Protection

Protective Orders – you may be eligible for a protective order if you've been subjected to an act involving violence, force, or threat that results in bodily injury or places you in reasonable fear of death, sexual assault, or bodily injury. A magistrate or judge issues a protective order. The type of relationship you have with the person you're filing against determines where you can request a protective order. For more assistance with protective orders, contact the Victim/Witness Program.

Separate Waiting Areas are available, in certain cases, for victims and witnesses who require privacy and protection from intimidation.

At the conclusion of the court hearing, if you fear for your safety, you may request an escort to your vehicle from the Sheriff's Office. Victim/Witness can assist you with this as well.

Dropping Charges

You cannot drop charges once they have been taken out. Only the Court can do that.

The Criminal Justice Process

<i>The Steps</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Which Court</i>	<i>Must You Appear</i>
Arraignment	1-5 days after arrest	General District or Juvenile & Domestic Relations District	No
Preliminary Hearing (or Trial if a misdemeanor)	30-60 days after arrest	General District or Juvenile & Domestic Relations District	Yes, if subpoenaed
Grand Jury	Meets Monthly	Circuit	No
Trial	60-120 days after Preliminary hearing	Circuit	Yes, if subpoenaed
Sentencing	60-90 days after guilty verdict or plea	Circuit	Yes, if subpoenaed

Please Note: Many times a case will take longer if continuances are granted

Notifications

Status of Release of Defendants or Prisoners
Victim/Witness Services can assist you in being notified of the release or change of status of the defendant in your case.

Employer Intercession

If you have been subpoenaed to court, your employer may not fire you, discipline you, or require you to use vacation or sick leave in order to go to court. However, your employer is not required to pay you for your time in court.

Notifications of Prisoner Appeals

You can be advised if the defendant in your case has appealed his/her sentence.

Change in Court Dates

You can be notified of any continuances, pleas, or other changes in court dates. If there is any change in your address or phone number, it is important to advise the Victim/Witness Program or the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office in order to be notified.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I am unable to make a court date?
Contact the assigned Commonwealth's Attorney and Clerk's Office immediately.

What if I am running late the day of court?
Contact the Clerk's Office of the court you are scheduled to appear in.

Do I need to come to court if I have been subpoenaed? Unless you are called off by Victim/Witness or the Commonwealth's Attorney, you must show up to court.

Can I bring my cellphone into the courthouse?
Unless instructed to bring your phone in for evidence purposes, you are not allowed to bring your cellphones or any wearable electronic devices into the courthouse.

What is court appropriate attire? No shorts, tank tops, flip flops, or clothing with obscene language or logos. Dress modestly.

Where do I park for court? There are two parking lots directly behind the Godwin Courts building. Please be aware that some parking spots are marked as two-hour parking.

We are aware that some victims and witnesses need certain accommodations. Victim Witness is here to assist you with referrals if necessary. We will do everything in our power to ensure your accommodations are met and that you understand the court process.