

History of Crime Victims Legislation in Missouri

Under the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes Law of 1997, a victim is a person who has suffered serious bodily harm or impairment to one's health, which is attributed directly to a violent crime, or to an individual who has died as a result of such crime.

Hospitals play an important role in the treatment of crime victims. Victims of violent and nonviolent crimes seek mental and physical help for injuries, as well as forensic evidence collection. In addition, hospital employees are all too often victims of crime.

Despite efforts to address the treatment, care, compensation and support of victims of sexual crimes throughout the past 25 years, it has been within the past three years that efforts in our state have coalesced, and significant changes are occurring.

- In 1979, the Missouri Adult Abuse Remedies Law was passed, which created the first legal protections for domestic violence victims and required that law enforcement officers respond to domestic violence crimes in the same way as to crimes between other persons.
- Surviving a crime like sexual assault can affect a victim's physical, emotional and psychological health. There also may be a financial impact — such as the cost of medical bills or lost wages. In 1984, Congress passed the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), which established the [Crime Victim's Fund](#). The fund, which is administered by the [Office for Victims of Crime](#), provides financial assistance to victims of crime through state-based compensation programs, as well as indirectly through state grants that help finance state victim service organizations.
- The Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program provides funding to support public crime laboratories' work to build capacity and process DNA evidence, including evidence collected in [rape kits](#). Since its enactment in 2004, the Debbie Smith Act has been renewed twice with bipartisan support, and it is authorized to provide as much as \$151 million in funding per year through fiscal year 2019. Through amendments passed in 2013 as the [SAFER Act](#), the Debbie Smith Act raised the minimum amount of funding that must go to testing and capacity-building activities. In addition, the act supports audits of evidence awaiting analysis at law enforcement agencies and charges the Justice Department with the task of developing national testing guidelines. The Debbie Smith Act distributes certain funds, often referred to as Debbie Smith grants, to all states. Grantees must comply with the rules that regulate distribution and use of funds, including creating explicit, transparent plans for the reduction of the backlog and meeting privacy standards when DNA evidence is collected from crime scenes or [sexual assault forensic exams](#).