

Key Legal Terms: Victim/Witness Assistance Program

Victim/Witness Assistance Program (V/WAP)

The Victim/Witness Assistance Program is a voluntary, free Ontario government program. Victim/Witness Assistance Program workers help victims and witnesses of crime navigate the criminal justice system after charges are laid. The program helps people:

- understand steps in the criminal process
- understand details about bail and probation orders
- prepare for court
- prepare Victim Impact Statements
- arrange interpreters and other accommodation
- find counseling, safety planning and other support resources

The program is voluntary, which means that a victim or witness can choose whether or not to participate. A person may be referred to the program at any stage of the criminal process after charges have been laid.

Victim

A victim is the person against whom a crime was committed. Canada's *Criminal Code* defines a "victim" as a person to whom harm was done or who suffered physical or emotional loss as a result of a crime.

Primary and Secondary Victims

The Victim/Witness Assistance Program helps both primary and secondary victims. A primary victim is the deceased or survivor of a criminal act. A secondary victim is a person affected by a connection to the primary victim. For example, a secondary victim could be a family member, friend, colleague, or neighbour of the primary victim.

Witness

A witness is a person who has seen or heard evidence or who has personal knowledge of a crime. A witness could be the victim, who will testify which means tell the story of what happened in court. A victim can also be a bystander who has some personal knowledge of the events of what happened.

Who does the Victim/Witness Assistance Program help?

The Victim/Witness Assistance Program offers free services on priority basis to the vulnerable victims and witnesses of violent crimes, such as:

- Sexual assault (recent, historical)
- Domestic Violence
- Child abuse
- Hate crimes
- Human trafficking

The V/WAP program also tries to offer services on a priority basis to victims and witnesses who may need more support and accommodation, including:

- Families of murder victims
- Families of driving fatalities
- Highly vulnerable victims, such as persons with disabilities, or the elderly

How the V/WAP worker will help

- discuss the person's specific needs for support
- explain the court process and steps in the trial
- talk about how long the process may take
- refer to community resources and support services

What the V/WAP worker cannot do

- have the charges dropped (withdraw charges)
- discuss evidence (proof in the case)
- suggest what will happen in the case
- give legal advice
- provide child care
- provide transportation



The views expressed in these materials are the views of FLEW and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.



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There is a greater risk of violence when an intimate relationship is ending. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. If you or

someone you know is at risk, visit the FLEW website for information on getting support.

If you are a francophone woman living in Ontario, you have the right to access French language services in family law court proceedings. For more information regarding your rights, contact a lawyer, a community legal clinic, or the support line Femaide at 1-877-336-2433, TTY 1-866-860-7082.

You can find more information on how to access services in French on our website at www.onefamilylaw.ca or www.undroitdefamille.ca.