

Free California Victims' Rights Laws

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X-PROBE AGENCY
Private Investigation Restitution Management

www.XProbeAgency.com
XProbeCA@gmail.com

Michael J. O'Connell
Private Investigator
(805) 242-3007

CA License # PI 27016

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This information is presented by X Probe Agency Private Investigations to help educate the public, and specifically the victims of crime, as to what rights and laws have been enacted to benefit the victims of crime. Please note that this information provided is not to be considered, construed or interpreted as "giving legal advice" by and to the reader. If the recipient or reader of this material wants legal advice or direction then the reader is advised to contact a licensed attorney at law who is qualified to render that legal advice.

CALIFORNIA VICTIMS' RIGHTS LAWS

Constitution

Article 1, § 28 Legislative findings and declaration; rights of victims; restitution; safe schools; truth-in-evidence; bail; prior convictions

(a) The People of the State of California find and declare all of the following:

- (1) Criminal activity has a serious impact on the citizens of California. The rights of victims of crime and their families in criminal prosecutions are a subject of grave statewide concern.
- (2) Victims of crime are entitled to have the criminal justice system view criminal acts as serious threats to the safety and welfare of the people of California. The enactment of comprehensive provisions and laws ensuring a bill of rights for victims of crime, including safeguards in the criminal justice system fully protecting those rights and ensuring that crime victims are treated with respect and dignity, is a matter of high public importance. California's victims of crime are largely dependent upon the proper functioning of government, upon the criminal justice system and upon the expeditious enforcement of the rights of victims of crime described herein, in order to protect the public safety and to secure justice when the public safety has been compromised by criminal activity.
- (3) The rights of victims pervade the criminal justice system. These rights include personally held and enforceable rights described in paragraphs (1) through (17) of subdivision (b).
- (4) The rights of victims also include broader shared collective rights that are held in common with all of the People of the State of California and that are enforceable through the enactment of laws and through good-faith efforts and actions of California's elected, appointed, and publicly employed officials. These rights encompass the expectation shared with all of the people of California that persons who commit felonious acts causing injury to innocent victims will be appropriately and thoroughly investigated, appropriately detained in custody, brought before the courts of California even if arrested outside the State, tried by the courts in a timely manner, sentenced, and sufficiently punished so that the public safety is protected and encouraged as a goal of highest importance.
- (5) Victims of crime have a collectively shared right to expect that persons convicted of committing criminal acts are sufficiently punished in both the manner and the length of the sentences imposed by the courts of the State of California. This right includes the right to expect that the punitive and deterrent effect of custodial sentences imposed by the courts will not be undercut or diminished by the granting of rights and privileges to prisoners that are not required by any provision of the United States Constitution or by the laws of this State to be granted to any person incarcerated in a penal or other custodial facility in this State as a punishment or correction for the commission of a crime.
- (6) Victims of crime are entitled to finality in their criminal cases. Lengthy appeals and other post-judgment proceedings that challenge criminal convictions, frequent and difficult parole hearings that threaten to release criminal offenders, and the ongoing threat that the sentences of criminal wrongdoers will be reduced, prolong the suffering of crime victims for many years after the crimes themselves have been perpetrated. This prolonged suffering of crime victims and their families must come to an end.

(7) Finally, the People find and declare that the right to public safety extends to public and private primary, elementary, junior high, and senior high school, and community college, California State University, University of California, and private college and university campuses, where students and staff have the right to be safe and secure in their persons.

(8) To accomplish the goals it is necessary that the laws of California relating to the criminal justice process be amended in order to protect the legitimate rights of victims of crime.

(b) In order to preserve and protect a victim's rights to justice and due process, a victim shall be entitled to the following rights:

(1) To be treated with fairness and respect for his or her privacy and dignity, and to be free from intimidation, harassment, and abuse, throughout the criminal or juvenile justice process.

(2) To be reasonably protected from the defendant and persons acting on behalf of the defendant.

(3) To have the safety of the victim and the victim's family considered in fixing the amount of bail and release conditions for the defendant.

(4) To prevent the disclosure of confidential information or records to the defendant, the defendant's attorney, or any other person acting on behalf of the defendant, which could be used to locate or harass the victim or the victim's family or which disclose confidential communications made in the course of medical or counseling treatment, or which are otherwise privileged or confidential by law.

(5) To refuse an interview, deposition, or discovery request by the defendant, the defendant's attorney, or any other person acting on behalf of the defendant, and to set reasonable conditions on the conduct of any such interview to which the victim consents.

(6) To reasonable notice of and to reasonably confer with the prosecuting agency, upon request, regarding, the arrest of the defendant if known by the prosecutor, the charges filed, the determination whether to extradite the defendant, and, upon request, to be notified of and informed before any pretrial disposition of the case.

(7) To reasonable notice of all public proceedings, including delinquency proceedings, upon request, at which the defendant and the prosecutor are entitled to be present and of all parole or other post-conviction release proceedings, and to be present at all such proceedings.

(8) To be heard, upon request, at any proceeding, including any delinquency proceeding, involving a post-arrest release decision, plea, sentencing, post-conviction release decision, or any proceeding in which a right of the victim is at issue.

(9) To a speedy trial and a prompt and final conclusion of the case and any related post-judgment proceedings.

(10) To provide information to a probation department official conducting a pre-sentence investigation concerning the impact of the offense on the victim and the victim's family and any sentencing recommendations before the sentencing of the defendant.

(11) To receive, upon request, the pre-sentence report when available to the defendant, except for those portions made confidential by law.

(12) To be informed, upon request, of the conviction, sentence, place and time of incarceration, or other disposition of the defendant, the scheduled release date of the defendant, and the release of or the escape by the defendant from custody.

(13) To restitution.

(A) It is the unequivocal intention of the People of the State of California that all persons who suffer losses as a result of criminal activity shall have the right to seek and secure restitution from the persons convicted of the crimes causing the losses they suffer.

(B) Restitution shall be ordered from the convicted wrongdoer in every case, regardless of the sentence or disposition imposed, in which a crime victim suffers a loss.

(C) All monetary payments, monies, and property collected from any person who has been ordered to make restitution shall be first applied to pay the amounts ordered as restitution to the victim.

(14) To the prompt return of property when no longer needed as evidence.

(15) To be informed of all parole procedures, to participate in the parole process, to provide information to the parole authority to be considered before the parole of the offender, and to be notified, upon request, of the parole or other release of the offender.

(16) To have the safety of the victim, the victim's family, and the general public considered before any parole or other post-judgment release decision is made.

(17) To be informed of the rights enumerated in paragraphs (1) through (16).

(c) (1) A victim, the retained attorney of a victim, a lawful representative of the victim, or the prosecuting attorney upon request of the victim, may enforce the rights enumerated in subdivision (b) in any trial or appellate court with jurisdiction over the case as a matter of right. The court shall act promptly on such a request.

(2) This section does not create any cause of action for compensation or damages against the State, any political subdivision of the State, any officer, employee, or agent of the State or of any of its political subdivisions, or any officer or employee of the court.

(d) The granting of these rights to victims shall not be construed to deny or disparage other rights possessed by victims. The court in its discretion may extend the right to be heard at sentencing to any person harmed by the defendant. The parole authority shall extend the right to be heard at a parole hearing to any person harmed by the offender.

(e) As used in this section, a "victim" is a person who suffers direct or threatened physical, psychological, or financial harm as a result of the commission or attempted commission of a crime or delinquent act. The term "victim" also includes the person's spouse, parents, children, siblings, or guardian, and includes a lawful representative of a crime victim who is deceased, a minor, or physically or psychologically incapacitated. The term "victim" does not include a person in custody for an offense, the accused, or a person whom the court finds would not act in the best interests of a minor victim.

(f) In addition to the enumerated rights provided in subdivision (b) that are personally enforceable by victims as provided in subdivision (c), victims of crime have additional rights that are shared with all of the People of the State of California. These collectively held rights include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) Right to Safe Schools. All students and staff of public primary, elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, and community colleges, colleges, and universities have the inalienable right to attend campuses which are safe, secure and peaceful.

(2) Right to Truth-in-Evidence. Except as provided by statute hereafter enacted by a two-thirds vote of the membership in each house of the Legislature, relevant evidence shall not be excluded in any criminal proceeding, including pretrial and postconviction motions and hearings, or in any trial or hearing of a juvenile for a criminal offense, whether heard in juvenile or adult court. Nothing in this section shall affect any existing statutory rule of evidence relating to privilege or hearsay, or Evidence Code Sections 352, 782 or 1103. Nothing in this section shall affect any existing statutory or constitutional right of the press.

(3) Public Safety Bail. A person may be released on bail by sufficient sureties, except for capital crimes when the facts are evident or the presumption great. Excessive bail may not be required. In setting, reducing or denying bail, the judge or magistrate shall take into consideration the protection of the public, the safety of the victim, the seriousness of the offense charged, the previous criminal record of the defendant, and the probability of his or her appearing at the trial or hearing of the case. Public safety and the safety of the victim shall be the primary considerations. A person may be released on his or her own recognizance in the court's discretion, subject to the same factors considered in setting bail. Before any person arrested for a serious felony may be released on bail, a hearing may be held before the magistrate or judge, and the prosecuting attorney and the victim shall be given notice and reasonable opportunity to be heard on the matter. When a judge or magistrate

grants or denies bail or release on a person's own recognizance, the reasons for that decision shall be stated in the record and included in the court's minutes.

(4) Use of Prior Convictions. Any prior felony conviction of any person in any criminal proceeding, whether adult or juvenile, shall subsequently be used without limitation for purposes of impeachment or enhancement of sentence in any criminal proceeding. When a prior felony conviction is an element of any felony offense, it shall be proven to the trier of fact in open court.

(5) Truth in Sentencing. Sentences that are individually imposed upon convicted criminal wrongdoers based upon the facts and circumstances surrounding their cases shall be carried out in compliance with the courts' sentencing orders, and shall not be substantially diminished by early release policies intended to alleviate overcrowding in custodial facilities. The legislative branch shall ensure sufficient funding to adequately house inmates for the full terms of their sentences, except for statutorily authorized credits which reduce those sentences.

(6) Reform of the parole process. The current process for parole hearings is excessive, especially in cases in which the defendant has been convicted of murder. The parole hearing process must be reformed for the benefit of crime victims.

(g) As used in this article, the term "serious felony" is any crime defined in subdivision (c) of Section 1192.7 of the Penal Code, or any successor statute.

Statutes

California Penal Code:

Rights of Victims and Witnesses of Crime

§ 679 – Legislative intent

In recognition of the civil and moral duty of victims and witnesses of crime to fully and voluntarily cooperate with law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies, and in further recognition of the continuing importance of this citizen cooperation to state and local law enforcement efforts and the general effectiveness and well-being of the criminal justice system of this state, the Legislature declares its intent, in the enactment of this title, to ensure that all victims and witnesses of crime are treated with dignity, respect, courtesy, and sensitivity. It is the further intent that the rights enumerated in Section 679.02 relating to victims and witnesses of crime are honored and protected by law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and judges in a manner no less vigorous than the protections afforded criminal defendants. It is the intent of the Legislature to add to Section 679.02 references to new rights as or as soon after they are created. The failure to enumerate in that section a right which is enumerated elsewhere in the law shall not be deemed to diminish the importance or enforceability of that right.

§ 679.01 – Definitions

As used in this title, the following definitions shall control:

(a) "Crime" means an act committed in this state which, if committed by a competent adult, would constitute a misdemeanor or felony.

(b) "Victim" means a person against whom a crime has been committed.

(c) "Witness" means any person who has been or is expected to testify for the prosecution, or who, by reason of having relevant information, is subject to call or likely to be called as a witness for the prosecution, whether or not any action or proceeding has yet been commenced.

§ 679.02 – Statutory rights of victims and witnesses of crime

(a) The following are hereby established as the statutory rights of victims and witnesses of crimes:

(1) To be notified as soon as feasible that a court proceeding to which he or she has been subpoenaed as a witness will not proceed as scheduled, provided the prosecuting attorney determines that the witness' attendance is not required.

- (2) Upon request of the victim or a witness, to be informed by the prosecuting attorney of the final disposition of the case, as provided by Section 11116.10.
- (3) For the victim, the victim's parents or guardian if the victim is a minor, or the next of kin of the victim if the victim has died, to be notified of all sentencing proceedings, and of the right to appear, to reasonably express his or her views, have those views preserved by audio or video means as provided in Section 1191.16, and to have the court consider his or her statements, as provided by Sections 1191.1 and 1191.15.
- (4) For the victim, the victim's parents or guardian if the victim is a minor, or the next of kin of the victim if the victim has died, to be notified of all juvenile disposition hearings in which the alleged act would have been a felony if committed by an adult, and of the right to attend and to express his or her views, as provided by Section 656.2 of the Welfare and Institutions Code.
- (5) Upon request by the victim or the next of kin of the victim if the victim has died, to be notified of any parole eligibility hearing and of the right to appear, either personally as provided by Section 3043 of this code, or by other means as provided by Sections 3043.2 and 3043.25 of this code, to reasonably express his or her views, and to have his or her statements considered, as provided by Section 3043 of this code and by Section 1767 of the Welfare and Institutions Code.
- (6) Upon request by the victim or the next of kin of the victim if the crime was a homicide, to be notified of an inmate's placement in a reentry or work furlough program, or notified of the inmate's escape as provided by Section 11155.
- (7) To be notified that he or she may be entitled to witness fees and mileage, as provided by Section 1329.1.
- (8) For the victim, to be provided with information concerning the victim's right to civil recovery and the opportunity to be compensated from the Restitution Fund pursuant to Chapter 5 (commencing with Section 13959) of Part 4 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code and Section 1191.2 of this code.
- (9) To the expeditious return of his or her property which has allegedly been stolen or embezzled, when it is no longer needed as evidence, as provided by Chapter 12 (commencing with Section 1407) and Chapter 13 (commencing with Section 1417) of Title 10 of Part 2.
- (10) To an expeditious disposition of the criminal action.
- (11) To be notified, if applicable, in accordance with Sections 679.03 and 3058.8 if the defendant is to be placed on parole.
- (12) For the victim, upon request, to be notified of any pretrial disposition of the case, to the extent required by Section 28 of Article I of the California Constitution.
 - (A) A victim may request to be notified of a pretrial disposition.
 - (B) The victim may be notified by any reasonable means available. Nothing in this paragraph is intended to affect the right of the people and the defendant to an expeditious disposition as provided in Section 1050.
- (13) For the victim, to be notified by the district attorney's office of the right to request, upon a form provided by the district attorney's office, and receive a notice pursuant to paragraph (14), if the defendant is convicted of any of the following offenses:
 - (A) Assault with intent to commit rape, sodomy, oral copulation, or any violation of Section 264.1, 288, or 289, in violation of Section 220.
 - (B) A violation of Section 207 or 209 committed with the intent to commit a violation of Section 261, 262, 286, 288, 288a, or 289.
 - (C) Rape, in violation of Section 261.
 - (D) Oral copulation, in violation of Section 288a.
 - (E) Sodomy, in violation of Section 286.
 - (F) A violation of Section 288.
 - (G) A violation of Section 289.

(14) When a victim has requested notification pursuant to paragraph (13), the sheriff shall inform the victim that the person who was convicted of the offense has been ordered to be placed on probation, and give the victim notice of the proposed date upon which the person will be released from the custody of the sheriff.

(b) The rights set forth in subdivision (a) shall be set forth in the information and educational materials prepared pursuant to Section 13897.1. The information and educational materials shall be distributed to local law enforcement agencies and local victims' programs by the Victims' Legal Resource Center established pursuant to Chapter 11 (commencing with Section 13897) of Title 6 of Part 4.

(c) Local law enforcement agencies shall make available copies of the materials described in subdivision (b) to victims and witnesses.

(d) Nothing in this section is intended to affect the rights and services provided to victims and witnesses by the local assistance centers for victims and witnesses.

(e) The court shall not release statements, made pursuant to paragraph (3) or (4) of subdivision (a), to the public prior to the statement being heard in court.

§ 679.026. – Informing crime victims of their rights; implementation (Marsy Rights)

(a) It is the intent of the people of the State of California in enacting this section to implement the rights of victims of crime established in Section 28 of Article I of the California Constitution to be informed of the rights of crime victims enumerated in the Constitution and in the statutes of this state.

(b) Every victim of crime has the right to receive without cost or charge a list of the rights of victims of crime recognized in Section 28 of Article I of the California Constitution. These rights shall be known as "Marsy Rights."

(c) (1) Every law enforcement agency investigating a criminal act and every agency prosecuting a criminal act shall, as provided herein, at the time of initial contact with a crime victim, during follow-up investigation, or as soon thereafter as deemed appropriate by investigating officers or prosecuting attorneys, provide or make available to each victim of the criminal act without charge or cost a "Marsy Rights" card described in paragraphs (3) and (4).

(2) The victim disclosures required under this section shall be available to the public at a state funded and maintained Web site authorized pursuant to Section 14260 of the Penal Code to be known as "Marsy's Page."

(3) The Attorney General shall design and make available in ".pdf" or other imaging format to every agency listed in paragraph (1) a "Marsy Rights" card, which shall contain the rights of crime victims described in subdivision (b) of Section 28 of Article I of the California Constitution, information on the means by which a crime victim can access the web page described in paragraph (2), and a toll-free telephone number to enable a crime victim to contact a local victim's assistance office.

(4) Every law enforcement agency which investigates criminal activity shall, if provided without cost to the agency by any organization classified as a nonprofit organization under paragraph (3) of subdivision (c) of Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code, make available and provide to every crime victim a "Victims' Survival and Resource Guide" pamphlet and/or video that has been approved by the Attorney General. The "Victims' Survival and Resource Guide" and video shall include an approved "Marsy Rights" card, a list of government agencies, nonprofit victims' rights groups, support groups, and local resources that assist crime victims, and any other information which the Attorney General determines might be helpful to victims of crime.

(5) Any agency described in paragraph (1) may in its discretion design and distribute to each victim of a criminal act its own Victims' Survival and Resource Guide and video, the contents of which have been approved by the Attorney General, in addition to or in lieu of the materials described in paragraph (4).

§ 679.03 – Violent offense; notice to witnesses, victims, and next of kin of right to notice of offender’s release or scheduled execution

(a) With respect to the conviction of a defendant involving a violent offense, as defined in subdivision (b) of Section 12021.1, the county district attorney, probation department, and victim-witness coordinator shall confer and establish an annual policy within existing resources to decide which one of their agencies shall inform each witness involved in the conviction who was threatened by the defendant following the defendant's arrest and each victim or next of kin of the victim of that offense of the right to request and receive a notice pursuant to Section 3058.8 or 3605. If no agreement is reached, the presiding judge shall designate the appropriate county agency or department to provide this notification.

(b) The Department of Corrections shall supply a form to the agency designated pursuant to subdivision (a) in order to enable persons specified in subdivision (a) to request and receive notification from the department of the release, escape, scheduled execution, or death of the violent offender. That agency shall give the form to the victim, witness, or next of kin of the victim for completion, explain to that person or persons the right to be so notified, and forward the completed form to the department. The department or the Board of Prison Terms is responsible for notifying all victims, witnesses, or next of kin of victims who request to be notified of a violent offender's release or scheduled execution, as provided by Sections 3058.8 and 3605.

(c) All information relating to any person receiving notice pursuant to subdivision (b) shall remain confidential and is not subject to disclosure pursuant to the California Public Records Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 6250) of Title 7 of Division 1 of the Government Code).

(d) Nothing in this section precludes a victim, witness, or next of kin of the victim from requesting notification using an automated electronic notification process, if available.

§ 679.04 – Victim of sexual assault; right to advocate and support person

(a) A victim of sexual assault as the result of any offense specified in paragraph (1) of subdivision (b) of Section 264.2 has the right to have victim advocates and a support person of the victim's choosing present at any interview by law enforcement authorities, district attorneys, or defense attorneys. However, the support person may be excluded from an interview by law enforcement or the district attorney if the law enforcement authority or the district attorney determines that the presence of that individual would be detrimental to the purpose of the interview. As used in this section, "victim advocate" means a sexual assault victim counselor, as defined in Section 1035.2 of the Evidence Code, or a victim advocate working in a center established under Article 2 (commencing with Section 13835) of Chapter 4 of Title 6 of Part 4.

(b) (1) Prior to the commencement of the initial interview by law enforcement authorities or the district attorney pertaining to any criminal action arising out of a sexual assault, a victim of sexual assault as the result of any offense specified in Section 264.2 shall be notified orally or in writing by the attending law enforcement authority or district attorney that the victim has the right to have victim advocates and a support person of the victim's choosing present at the interview or contact. This subdivision applies to investigators and agents employed or retained by law enforcement or the district attorney.

(2) At the time the victim is advised of his or her rights pursuant to paragraph (1), the attending law enforcement authority or district attorney shall also advise the victim of the right to have victim advocates and a support person present at any interview by the defense attorney or investigators or agents employed by the defense attorney.

(c) An initial investigation by law enforcement to determine whether a crime has been committed and the identity of the suspects shall not constitute a law enforcement interview for purposes of this section.

§ 679.05 – Right to have domestic violence or abuse counselors present at interviews with law enforcement authorities; notice

(a) A victim of domestic violence or abuse, as defined in Section 6203 or 6211 of the Family Code, or Section 13700 of this code, has the right to have a domestic violence counselor and a support person of the victim's choosing present at any interview by law enforcement authorities, district attorneys, or defense attorneys. However, the support person may be excluded from an interview by law enforcement or the district attorney if the law enforcement authority or the district attorney determines that the presence of that individual would be detrimental to the purpose of the interview. As used in this section, "domestic violence counselor" is defined in Section 1037.1 of the Evidence Code. Prior to being present at any interview conducted by law enforcement authorities, prosecutors, or defense attorneys, a domestic violence advocate shall advise the victim of any applicable limitations on the confidentiality of communications between the victim and the domestic violence advocate.

(b) (1) Prior to the commencement of the initial interview by law enforcement authorities or the district attorney pertaining to any criminal action arising out of a domestic violence incident, a victim of domestic violence or abuse, as defined in Section 6203 or 6211 of the Family Code, or Section 13700 of this code, shall be notified orally or in writing by the attending law enforcement authority or district attorney that the victim has the right to have a domestic violence counselor and a support person of the victim's choosing present at the interview or contact. This subdivision applies to investigators and agents employed or retained by law enforcement or the prosecutor.

(2) At the time the victim is advised of his or her rights pursuant to paragraph (1), the attending law enforcement authority or district attorney shall also advise the victim of the right to have a domestic violence counselor and a support person present at any interview by the defense attorney or investigators or agents employed by the defense attorney.

(c) An initial investigation by law enforcement to determine whether a crime has been committed and the identity of the suspects shall not constitute a law enforcement interview for purposes of this section.

§ 679.08 – Notification of Victims' Rights (Victim's Rights Card)

(a) (1) Whenever there has been a crime committed against a victim, the law enforcement officer assigned to the case may provide the victim of the crime with a "Victim's Rights Card," as specified in subdivision (b).

(2) This section shall be operative in a city or county only upon the adoption of a resolution by the city council or board of supervisors to that effect.

(3) This section shall not be interpreted as replacing or prohibiting any services currently offered to victims of crime by any agency or person affected by this section.

(b) A "Victim's Rights Card" means a card or paper that provides a printed notice with a disclaimer, in at least 10-point type, to a victim of a crime regarding potential services that may be available under existing state law to assist the victim. The printed notice shall include the following language or language substantially similar to the following:

"California law provides crime victims with important rights. If you are a victim of crime, you may be entitled to the assistance of a victim advocate who can answer many of the questions you might have about the criminal justice system."

"Victim advocates can assist you with the following:

- (1) Explaining what information you are entitled to receive while criminal proceedings are pending.
- (2) Assisting you in applying for restitution to compensate you for crime-related losses.
- (3) Communicating with the prosecution.
- (4) Assisting you in receiving victim support services.
- (5) Helping you prepare a victim impact statement before an offender is sentenced."

"To speak with a victim advocate, please call any of the following numbers:"

[Set forth the name and phone number, including area code, of all victim advocate agencies in the local jurisdiction]

"PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS INFORMATION IS PROVIDED IN AN ATTEMPT TO ASSIST THE VICTIM, BY NOTIFYING THE VICTIM ABOUT SOME, BUT NOT NECESSARILY ALL, SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THE VICTIM; THE PROVISION OF THIS INFORMATION AND THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN IS NOT LEGAL ADVICE AND IS NOT INTENDED TO CONSTITUTE A GUARANTEE OF ANY VICTIM'S RIGHTS OR OF A VICTIM'S ELIGIBILITY OR ENTITLEMENT TO ANY SPECIFIC BENEFITS OR SERVICES."

(c) Any act or omission covered by this section is a discretionary act pursuant to Section 820.2 of the Government Code.

§ 680 – Sexual Assault Victims' DNA Bill of Rights

(a) This section shall be known as and may be cited as the "Sexual Assault Victims' DNA Bill of Rights."

(b) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and forensic identification analysis is a powerful law enforcement tool for identifying and prosecuting sexual assault offenders.

(2) Victims of sexual assaults have a strong interest in the investigation and prosecution of their cases.

(3) Law enforcement agencies have an obligation to victims of sexual assaults in the proper handling, retention and timely DNA testing of rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence and to be responsive to victims concerning the developments of forensic testing and the investigation of their cases.

(4) The growth of the Department of Justice's Cal-DNA databank and the national databank through the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) makes it possible for many sexual assault perpetrators to be identified after their first offense, provided that rape kit evidence is analyzed in a timely manner.

(5) Timely DNA analysis of rape kit evidence is a core public safety issue affecting men, women, and children in the State of California. It is the intent of the Legislature, in order to further public safety, to encourage DNA analysis of rape kit evidence within the time limits imposed by subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (i) of Section 803.

(6) A law enforcement agency assigned to investigate a sexual assault offense specified in Section 261, 261.5, 262, 286, 288a, or 289 should perform DNA testing of rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence in a timely manner in order to assure the longest possible statute of limitations, pursuant to subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (i) of Section 803.

(7) For the purpose of this section, "law enforcement" means the law enforcement agency with the primary responsibility for investigating an alleged sexual assault.

(c) (1) Upon the request of a sexual assault victim the law enforcement agency investigating a violation of Section 261, 261.5, 262, 286, 288a, or 289 may inform the victim of the status of the DNA testing of the rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence from the victim's case. The law enforcement agency may, at its discretion, require that the victim's request be in writing. The law enforcement agency may respond to the victim's request with either an oral or written communication, or by electronic mail, if an electronic mail address is available. Nothing in this subdivision requires that the law enforcement agency communicate with the victim or the victim's designee regarding the status of DNA testing absent a specific request from the victim or the victim's designee.

(2) Subject to the commitment of sufficient resources to respond to requests for information, sexual assault victims have the following rights:

(A) The right to be informed whether or not a DNA profile of the assailant was obtained from the testing of the rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence from their case.

(B) The right to be informed whether or not the DNA profile of the assailant developed from the rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence has been entered into the Department of Justice Data Bank of case evidence.

(C) The right to be informed whether or not there is a match between the DNA profile of the assailant developed from the rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence and a DNA profile contained in the Department of Justice Convicted Offender DNA Data Base, provided that disclosure would not impede or compromise an ongoing investigation.

(3) This subdivision is intended to encourage law enforcement agencies to notify victims of information which is in their possession. It is not intended to affect the manner of or frequency with which the Department of Justice provides this information to law enforcement agencies.

(d) If the law enforcement agency elects not to analyze DNA evidence within the time limits established by subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (i) of Section 803, a victim of a sexual assault offense specified in Section 261, 261.5, 262, 286, 288a, or 289, where the identity of the perpetrator is in issue, shall be informed, either orally or in writing, of that fact by the law enforcement agency.

(e) If the law enforcement agency intends to destroy or dispose of rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence from an unsolved sexual assault case prior to the expiration of the statute of limitations as set forth in Section 803, a victim of a violation of Section 261, 261.5, 262, 286, 288a, or 289 shall be given written notification by the law enforcement agency of that intention.

(f) Written notification under subdivision (d) or (e) shall be made at least 60 days prior to the destruction or disposal of the rape kit evidence or other crime scene evidence from an unsolved sexual assault case where the election not to analyze the DNA or the destruction or disposal occurs prior to the expiration of the statute of limitations specified in subdivision (i) of Section 803.

(g) A sexual assault victim may designate a sexual assault victim advocate, or other support person of the victim's choosing, to act as a recipient of the above information required to be provided by this section.

(h) It is the intent of the Legislature that a law enforcement agency responsible for providing information under subdivision (c) do so in a timely manner and, upon request of the victim or the victim's designee, advise the victim or the victim's designee of any significant changes in the information of which the law enforcement agency is aware. In order to be entitled to receive notice under this section, the victim or the victim's designee shall keep appropriate authorities informed of the name, address, telephone number, and electronic mail address of the person to whom the information should be provided, and any changes of the name, address, telephone number, and electronic mail address, if an electronic mailing address is available.

(i) A defendant or person accused or convicted of a crime against the victim shall have no standing to object to any failure to comply with this section. The failure to provide a right or notice to a sexual assault victim under this section may not be used by a defendant to seek to have the conviction or sentence set aside.

(j) The sole civil or criminal remedy available to a sexual assault victim for a law enforcement agency's failure to fulfill its responsibilities under this section is standing to file a writ of mandamus to require compliance with subdivision (d) or (e).

Other Victims' Rights Statutes:

§ 1102.6 – Victims; right to be present at proceedings; exclusion criteria

The right of a victim of crime to be present during any criminal proceeding shall be secured as follows:

(a) Notwithstanding any other law, and except as specified in subdivision (d), a victim shall be entitled to be present and seated at all criminal proceedings where the defendant, the prosecuting attorney, and the general public are entitled to be present.

(b) A victim may be excluded from a criminal proceeding only if each of the following criteria are met:

(1) Any movant, including the defendant, who seeks to exclude the victim from any criminal proceeding demonstrates that there is a substantial probability that overriding interests will be prejudiced by the presence of the victim. "Overriding interests" may include, but are not limited to, the following:

(A) The defendant's right to a fair trial.

(B) The government's interest in inhibiting the disclosure of sensitive information.

(C) The protection of witnesses from harassment and physical harm.

(D) The court's interest in maintaining order.

(E) The protection of sexual offense victims from the trauma and embarrassment of testifying.

(F) Safeguarding the physical and psychological well-being of a minor.

(G) The preservation of trade secrets.

(2) The court considers reasonable alternatives to exclusion of the victim from the criminal proceeding.

(3) The exclusion of the victim from any criminal proceeding, or any limitation on his or her presence at any criminal proceeding, is narrowly tailored to serve the overriding interests identified by the movant.

(4) Following a hearing at which any victim who is to be excluded from a criminal proceeding is afforded an opportunity to be heard, the court makes specific factual findings that support the exclusion of the victim from, or any limitation on his or her presence at, the criminal proceeding.

(c) As used in this section, "victim" means (1) the alleged victim of the offense and one person of his or her choosing or however many more the court may allow under the particular circumstances surrounding the proceeding, (2) in the event that the victim is unable to attend the proceeding, two persons designated by the victim or however many more the court may allow under the particular circumstances surrounding the proceeding, or (3) if the victim is no longer living, two members of the victim's immediate family or however many more the court may allow under the particular circumstances surrounding the proceeding.

(d) Nothing in this section shall prevent a court from excluding a victim from a criminal proceeding, pursuant to Section 777 of the Evidence Code, when the victim is subpoenaed as a witness. An order of exclusion shall be consistent with the objectives of paragraphs (1) to (4), inclusive, of subdivision (b) to allow the victim to be present, whenever possible, at all proceedings.