



Fairness, Dignity & Respect

for Crime Victims & Survivors

The mission of the **Fairness, Dignity & Respect for Crime Victims & Survivors Project**, founded in 2015, is to enhance policies, programs and practices nationwide that meet and treat victims where they are with fairness, dignity and respect. The Director has been a national crime victim advocate for 35 years.

I write today to urge you to vote No on Senators Cotton and Kennedy's "Victim Notification"

Amendment. It is clear that Congress can and must do more to support the needs and rights of crime victims and survivors. I am disappointed that almost no elements of the *First Step Act* are tailored specifically to the needs of victims. However, Senators Cotton and Kennedy's proposed amendments neither comply with best practices in trauma-informed victim services, nor improve this bill.

First, the *Crime Victims' Rights Act* (CVRA) already requires that victims who register with the Federal Victim Notification System (VNS) be notified about the custody status and release of an inmate. This proposed amendment would notify all survivors, whether they choose to be notified or not. This takes away the victim's autonomy to choose to remain informed and notified, and *autonomy* is a key tenet of trauma-informed victim/survivor assistance. The decision to be notified or not of an offender's status should be up to the sole determination of the victim, based upon his or her wishes, personal experiences and circumstances.

Second, the language in section (ii) of this amendment, which attempts to create a "victim impact statement" is far too ambiguous. For example, it is unclear who solicits this statement or the process by which they should do so. There is no mention of training, staffing, or implementation in accordance with best practices working with victims and survivors. The amendment does not clarify how decisions about the statement are made or to what extent these statements should be factored into consideration by Wardens deciding whether an inmate is "best suited" to be transferred to pre-release custody.

Congress can and must do more to meet the needs of crime victims and survivors such as, for example, by creating a Victim/Survivor Assistance Program within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The BOP is the *only* corrections department in the nation that does *not* currently have a Victim Assistance Program, and for many years, I have personally offered the BOP my support and technical assistance to create such a vital program. A Victim/ Survivor Assistance Program could provide guidance to the BOP and its institutions on victim/survivor assistance that fully complies with the CVRA (including reasonable protection, notice, and to be reasonably heard); coordinate victim/survivor service provision with other Federal agencies; develop and conduct trauma-informed training to Bureau employees; and collect and analyze data about BOP victim/survivor services.

I urge you to vote No on Senators Cotton and Kennedy's amendments, and encourage you to offer solutions that are better tailored to identify and address the critical needs of crime victims and survivors in a manner that is survivor-centered and trauma-informed. I stand ready to assist the U.S. Congress with this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Anne Seymour
Project Director