



# MASSACHUSETTS VICTIM RIGHTS MONTH

April 2024



**Massachusetts Office  
for Victim Assistance**

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Massachusetts Office For Victim Assistance

**MOVA**

Victim & Witness Assistance Board

**40TH ANNIVERSARY**

Partnership. Advocacy. Equity. Survivor Informed

Massachusetts Office For Victim Assistance

# MOVA

Victim & Witness Assistance Board

**40TH ANNIVERSARY**

*Partnership. Advocacy. Equity. Survivor Informed*

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MOVA is an independent state agency governed by the Victim and Witness Assistance Board. MOVA strives to advance victim rights by ensuring all victims and survivors of crime across the Commonwealth are supported and empowered through access to high-quality services that are trauma-informed, culturally-responsive, and reflective of diverse communities. MOVA achieves this through survivor-informed work, advocacy for enhanced victim rights and services, partnerships with agencies and individuals, and a commitment to providing funding and services for underserved and marginalized communities.

# MASSACHUSETTS

## Victim Rights Month

### 2024 VICTIM RIGHTS MONTH AWARD CEREMONY

*April 23, 2024*

*1:00- 3:00 p.m.*

*Massachusetts State House,  
Grand Staircase*



Massachusetts Office For Victim Assistance

# MOVA

Victim & Witness Assistance Board

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# **Victim Rights Awards Ceremony**

April 23, 2024

## **Welcome and Proclamation**

*Liam Lowney, MOVA Executive Director*

## **Opening Remarks**

*Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell*

## **Presentation of Victim Rights Month Awards**

*Members, Victim and Witness Assistance Board*

### **Gerard D. Downing Leadership Award**

Ronit Barkai, Transition House

### **Legislator of the Year Award**

Senator Adam Gomez

### **Advocate of the Year Award**

Sheelah Gobar, Children's Advocacy Center of Suffolk County

Anthia Elliott, Behavioral Health Network

Julie Devlin, Massachusetts Parole Board

### **Innovation Award**

Jesse Moskowitz, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)

### **Access to Justice Award**

Amy Hamill, The Second Step

Kate Lagana, Suffolk County District Attorney's Office

### **Public Policy Advocacy Award**

Shaquera Robinson, Shaquera's Story Domestic Violence

Consulting & Coaching, Inc.

## **Closing Remarks**

*Liam Lowney, MOVA Executive Director*

Massachusetts Office For Victim Assistance

**MOVA**

Victim & Witness Assistance Board

40TH ANNIVERSARY

Partnership. Advocacy. Equity. Service. Integrity.



## **THE GERARD D. DOWNING LEADERSHIP AWARD**

recognizes a public or private agency leader who has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing the rights of crime victims. This individual is recognized by their colleagues for their efforts in advancing victim rights.



**Ronit Barkai**

*Transition House*

Ronit came to Transition House in 2002. She immigrated from Israel with her family in 1996 and completed an MS in Counseling and Psychology soon after. With over 30 years of experience in the sexual assault and domestic violence prevention and intervention field, one of her passions and commitments is to expand housing and support options for survivors of domestic violence beyond shelter. Ronit has been instrumental in developing new and creative programs for Transition House. This includes the Pathways to Safety Community program that involves a unique partnership with MOVA and the local housing authority (Cambridge Housing Authority). Working with people as they change their lives fuels and excites her.

## ***THE LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD***

recognizes a legislator who has made outstanding contributions to the victim rights movement through promoting legislation and policy that further rights and services to victims and survivors.



**Senator  
Adam Gomez**

State Senator Adam Gomez (D-Springfield) is a life long native of western Massachusetts. He is a proud Boricua, a father of three, a former small business owner, and a tireless advocate for Veterans and Black and Latino communities. He is also the first Latino from the Hampden District to serve in the Massachusetts Senate.

His personal beliefs and experiences have driven his years of advocacy work for social justice issues such as criminal justice reform, immigrant rights, education issues, and civil rights. He has served as a member of various boards for local organizations in his District, many of which directly serve the Latino community. Prior to becoming a Senator he served as a Springfield City Councilor.

In his second term now, Senator Gomez has already helped pass several landmark pieces of legislation into law this session through bills he sponsored that: ensure membership of the state's Victim and Witness Assistance Board has equitable and fair representation; improve processes related to the expungement of one's cannabis expungement records; provide undocumented immigrants the ability to have a driver's license; and eliminate hair discrimination from our workplace and schools.

Senator Gomez proudly serves the Hampden District, consisting of the communities Springfield and Chicopee. He serves as the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Cannabis Policy and Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Election Laws.

## **THE ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD**

recognizes an individual from a public and/or community-based agency who has made extraordinary contributions to the lives of victims and survivors.



**Sheelah Gobar,**  
*Children's  
Advocacy  
Center of  
Suffolk County*

As the Support to End Exploitation Now (SEEN) Program Manager at the Children's Advocacy Center of Suffolk County, Sheelah Gobar has coordinated multidisciplinary interventions for over 600 referrals of commercially sexually exploited and high-risk youth (CSEC). Sheelah provides guidance and leadership to the SEEN team to ensure prompt communication among multidisciplinary team members, and victim-centered responses for youth and families. She provides training and consultation to local, state, and national audiences on CSEC and responding to missing youth.

Sheelah came to the CAC in 2016 after completing her MS in Crime and Justice Studies at Suffolk University with a concentration in Victim Advocacy. Sheelah previously served as a rape crisis counselor where she provided medical advocacy to sexual assault survivors. Prior, Sheelah received her BS in Political Science at Northeastern University with a concentration in International and Comparative Politics, and worked in international urban development supporting research and capacity-building projects. Sheelah is motivated to provide an evidence-based, trauma-informed response for the high-risk missing and sexually exploited youth referred to SEEN.

## **THE ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD**

recognizes an individual from a public and/or community-based agency who has made extraordinary contributions to the lives of victims and survivors.



**Anthia Elliott**

*Behavioral  
Health Network*

Anthia T. Elliott is currently the Director of Domestic Violence and PATCH Services for the Behavioral Health Network Inc. of Massachusetts.

Ms Elliott holds two higher education degrees: an Associate degree in Tele-communications from Springfield Technical Community College and a Bachelors of Science degree with a concentration in Social Work from Westfield State University.

Ms Elliott is a 30 plus years experienced Director working in the human service field. Ms Elliott's breath of experience includes working with Juvenile runaways, children, and adults with behavioral, cognitive, and mental health challenges and for the last 20 plus years with survivors of domestic violence and their families.



## ***THE ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD***

recognizes an individual from a public and/or community-based agency who has made extraordinary contributions to the lives of victims and survivors.



**Julie Devlin**

*Massachusetts  
Parole Board*

Julie Devlin is currently the Supervisor of the Victim Services Unit at the Massachusetts Parole Board. She has been with the Parole Board for seventeen years as Victim Services Coordinator and in the victim services field for twenty-four years. Julie began her career as Investigator/Advocate in the Victim Compensation Division of the Office of the Attorney General. After leaving the Office of the Attorney General, Julie went on to be the Supervisor/Victim Advocate at DCJIS - Victim Services Unit.

## THE INNOVATION AWARD

recognizes an individual survivor, service provider, agency, or organization (criminal justice and/or community-based) who has developed an innovative program or policy that helps crime victims.



**Jesse Moskowitz**

*Boston Area Rape  
Crisis Center*

Jesse Moskowitz started work supporting survivors of sexual violence and their communities as a hotline volunteer at BARCC (Boston Area Rape Crisis Center) in 2005. After working in a number of social services jobs, she joined BARCC full time as the Hotline Coordinator in 2011. While managing the hotline Jesse expanded services beyond phone support to include a web chat option allowing survivors access to support in the way that is most comfortable for them. The team of folks answering calls and chats was also expanded - from a small group of volunteers to over 80 volunteers and 12 staff shift supervisors.

In her current role as Emergency Services Senior Director Jesse continues to oversee the traditional 24-hr phone hotline and newer web chat hotline as well as BARCC's hotline for incarcerated survivors and the 24-hr medical advocacy program. BARCC's emergency services provide a vital lifeline for survivors and those in their lives. From the time right after an assault in the hospital to years or decades out on the hotlines, survivors know they can always count on the volunteers and staff at BARCC being available to offer compassion, information, care and human connection. This mission is what has kept Jesse invested in the work and committed to exploring new ways to increase access to BARCC's emergency services for all survivors.

## **THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE AWARD**

recognizes a survivor, service provider, agency, or organization (criminal justice and/or community-based) whose leadership and outreach efforts have made victim rights and services more accessible or readily available to underserved populations.



**Amy Hamill**

*The Second Step*

Amy Hamill is Director of Steps to Justice (STJ), the legal services division of The Second Step ([www.thesecondstep.org](http://www.thesecondstep.org)), a non-profit agency dedicated to providing victims & survivors of domestic violence with the supports and concrete services necessary to achieve lasting safety, stability, and well-being. Raised in Massachusetts, she is a graduate of Milton Academy, Columbia College, and the Fordham University School of Law. Throughout the span of her career, she has advocated on behalf of victims of crime and abuse in her positions at several agencies: the Middlesex District Attorney's Office (Appeals Bureau), Helpers for Domestic Violence, the Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre, and the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General (Civil Rights Division). In 2016, Amy joined TSS as a Staff Attorney, and in 2021 she was named Director of STJ. She continues to provide direct legal services to victims of domestic violence, advocating for them both inside and outside of the courtroom, while supervising a team of talented attorneys.

## **THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE AWARD**

recognizes a survivor, service provider, agency, or organization (criminal justice and/or community-based) whose leadership and outreach efforts have made victim rights and services more accessible or readily available to underserved populations.



**Kate Lagana**

*Suffolk County  
District Attorney's  
Office*

Kate Lagana is the Deputy Chief of the Victim Witness Assistance Program at the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office. She first joined the DA's Office as a District Court Victim Witness Advocate in East Boston, later served as a Superior Court Victim Witness Advocate and Supervisor in the Child Protection Unit and, most recently, as Deputy Chief. As an advocate, she provided crisis intervention, service referrals, designed safety plans and gained experience working within a Multi-Disciplinary Team. As Deputy Chief, Kate helps oversee the development and implementation of program policies and operations. She also supports victim witness advocate training and program evaluation and strives to ensure that survivors' voices are heard throughout the criminal justice process.

Kate's professional background includes advocacy, case management, and providing services to adult and child survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Kate received her BA at Gettysburg College where she studied Spanish, Sociology and Women's Studies.

## THE PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY AWARD

recognizes a survivor of crime who has transformed their experience of victimization into impactful change through promoting legislation or advocating for policy changes that further rights and services to fellow victims and survivors.



**Shaquera Robinson**

*Shaquera's Story  
Domestic Violence  
Consulting &  
Coaching, Inc.*

As an educator, public health professional, community activist, civic engagement leader, scholar across academic and public sectors, and consultant, Shaquera Robinson is proud to be a founding member of the Together Rising Above Coercion Coalition (TRAC). Today, Robinson answers the call for public health crisis through her role as a Community Engagement Specialist with Massachusetts Community Engagement Alliance (MA-CEAL). Shaquera has recently been selected by the National Institute of Health to serve as an Expert reviewer for national public health initiatives addressing health disparities through the NIH Build UP Trust Challenge. Shaquera envisions her contributions to the collective-responsibility of public health services, by amplifying the works between community-based organization partners, medical faculty and staff, alongside stakeholders across the continuum to increase overall positive health outcomes. Shaquera Robinson is a leader, an influencer, and a force to be reckoned with. Shaquera is currently adding the title author to her name, as she is in the works of pursuing domestic violence education attainment through her line of children and adult literature. Shaquera's mantra is "We all We got", as she continues to break cycles of generational trauma by supporting and coaching people living through such experiences caused by DV. By sharing her values of family and service through her everyday commitment, she continues to bring light and awareness to the endemic of domestic violence. As an activist, Shaquera has answered the call to disrupt the cycles of domestic abuse through Shaquera's Story Domestic Violence Consulting & Coaching, Inc.



# THE MASSACHUSETTS VICTIM BILL OF RIGHTS

## M.G.L. CH. 258B

The Massachusetts Victim Bill of Rights (M.G.L c2588) provides the below rights and services to victims and survivors of crime in order to ensure a meaningful role for them in the criminal justice system. While the Bill of Rights applies to all crimes, victims and survivors of violent crimes are given priority status for services.

Victim assistance programs are available in each District Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General, and several post-conviction agencies. After the crime has occurred the needs of victims and their families often change. The Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA) is committed to working with community providers to find the services that meet a victim's evolving needs.

Below are some of the rights to which victims and witnesses are entitled For a complete listing of rights, please refer to the Victim Bill of Rights (M.G.L c2588).

### *You have the right to*

- **Be Informed about victim rights and services In the criminal Justice system.**
- **To receive specific Information about the criminal case.**
- **To be heard and present at court proceedings.**
- **To confer with key officials at major stages In the court process.**
- **To financial assistance.**
- **To be notified of an offender's release or status while In custody.**
- **To other protections In the criminal justice system.**

# THE GARDEN OF PEACE

The Garden is the Massachusetts memorial to victims of homicide, a place where families, friends, and the larger community may remember and honor the lives of those taken by violence. It's an enduring reminder of the impact of violence and a visual testament of the need to eliminate it. At the same time, the Garden serves as a symbol of hope, peace, and renewal.

## *Support the Garden of Peace*

The Garden of Peace is sustained by the generosity of individuals, groups, foundations, and corporations. A donation will help us maintain the Garden, including providing subsidies for families who can't afford the full cost of engravings. Support from individuals and groups is greatly appreciated as there's currently no dedicated state appropriation for ongoing Garden operations. Donations to the Garden of Peace are tax-deductible as allowed by law. For donations to remember or honor someone special, please provide the relevant information and we'll send an acknowledgment.

***For more information  
click here***

## *Application for Engraving*

Applications may be submitted any time throughout the year, keeping in mind any applications received and verified before August 1st will allow for engraving the same year and read aloud at the Annual Honor Program in September. Any application received and verified after August 1st may be held for engraving the following year and will be read aloud also during the following year.

***For more information  
click here***

# ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

## ***Celebrating 40 Years***

2024 is the **40th anniversary of MOVA, the Victim and Witness Assistance Board, and the formalization of Victim Rights in Massachusetts through the development of the Victim Bill of Rights.** MOVA is launching a year long social media campaign highlighting the voices of survivors, providers, and allies within the Commonwealth. We invite you to celebrate this milestone with us.

***For more information***  
***click here***

## ***VOCA Bridge Advocacy***

The **VOCA Bridge** is a multi-year funding request to the Massachusetts Legislature to bridge impending cuts to Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) programs to maintain victim services.

A continued state investment will support and stabilize critical victim service programs throughout the Commonwealth and ensure that access to trauma informed services remains accessible amid devastating reductions in federal funding.

***For more information***  
***click here***