



WE'RE ASKING FOR YOUR HELP TO PASS S.1559!

What is Senate Bill 1559?

S.1559 is a bill that was filed by the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA) to make the existing Victim Bill of Rights even stronger. This comprehensive update will ensure the safe, effective and meaningful participation of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system. Among other things, this bill will:

- Amend the definition of “family member” to include the grandparents of victims and witnesses
- Require that all courthouses include a separate and secure waiting area for victims and witnesses
- Ensure that families of victims in unsolved homicides and non-English speaking victims and witness receive notice of their rights

Who Supports It?

So far, we have the official support of every single District Attorney in the Commonwealth, The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, The Center for Homicide Bereavement, the Garden of Peace, Jane Doe Inc. and its member organizations, the Disabled Persons Protection Commission and many, many others.

What Can I Do to Help Get it Passed into Law?

This bill will be scheduled for a public hearing any day now – and we want to be sure that the members of the Legislature and, in particular, the Judiciary Committee hear from people across the state about why they need to support this legislation. That's where you come in.

Legislators really respond when they hear from the people who will be directly impacted and helped by this law. Your support and stories are what will make them pay attention to the bill.

Here are a couple of simple things you can do to help us pass S.1559:

1. Write a letter or email in support of S.1559. (Flip this sheet over to learn how)
2. Consider joining the MOVA listserv – that way, you'll get our updates on the bill. Just send an email to: join-mova@state.ma.us
3. If you're available, attend the bill's public hearing to show your support! Just being present makes a statement.

Does it Really Make a Difference to Reach Out?

Yes, yes, and YES!

Legislators work hard. They work on many, many issues every single day. Like many of us, sometimes they need that extra reminder that we're out here and counting on them to make sure victims and witnesses are afforded the rights that they deserve.

Sample Letter, Email or Testimony Suggestions

S.1559 An Act to Protect & Advance the Rights of Child & Adult Victims and Witnesses of Crime

Paragraph one:

Introduce yourself, explain why you're writing, and urge them to support Senate Bill 1559, a critical amendment to the MA Victim Bill of Rights.

Paragraph Two:

Your goal is to tell the Committee members why you believe they ought to support this victim rights legislation.

Specifically, you may wish to express:

- Your personal interest / experience with the Victim Bill of Rights—the right to receive notice and information about the criminal justice system and your case; to have a Victim Witness Advocate assist you and give you support throughout your case and to have a voice in the process.
- If you feel comfortable, please share brief details of your victimization experience (as it helps explain why this legislation is critical in helping victims go through the court process and get the services they need). You may also simply say that you come before them as a survivor of crime. You'll find that the Committee members will be incredibly respectful and understanding.
- If you were part of the MOVA focus group process a few years ago, or had any conversations with MOVA staff or your local advocate or victim services agency, which helped shape this victim rights legislation, you might note that at the beginning.
- Did you experience any obstacles when you went through the court process that this legislation would address or eliminate? If so, highlight those issues and explain that this legislation would help other victims of crime. For example:
 - You had to sit in the hallway in a courthouse near the defendant and wish that you had had a separate and secure place to wait ... as this legislation would mandate.
 - You wished there had been clearer notice of your rights under the victim bill of rights or in a language other than English.
 - You know how important it was for your child (witness) to have a support person in the courtroom and to be familiarized with the courtroom in advance of testifying.

(Note: These are just examples to get you thinking about what you might share. Please make your own voice in your own way based on your own experiences be heard!)

Paragraph Three:

Thank the Committee for their consideration of S.1559 and strongly urge them to support this victim rights bill.