



Department of Justice



Office of Justice Programs

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT HONORS AIR FORCE PROGRAM PROVIDING FREE LEGAL SERVICES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS

WASHINGTON—The Department of Justice will recognize the U.S. Air Force Special Victims' Counsel Program with the Federal Service Award for providing 787 sexual assault victims free legal representation and guiding them through the military justice process.

“Through their courage and critical contributions to assist and empower victims, these individuals and organizations have given hope to countless Americans victimized by crime—even under the most difficult circumstances,” said Attorney General Eric Holder. “I am proud to recognize these extraordinary advocates by celebrating their achievements and assure them that the Department of Justice is more determined than ever to help ensure their continued success.”

Military representatives will receive the award during the annual National Crime Victims' Rights Service Awards ceremony Wed., April 9, in Washington, D.C.

The program, initially created by the Department of Defense as a pilot program in Jan. 2013, also advises victims on investigative and military justice processes, protects the rights afforded to these victims and empowers them by removing barriers to their full participation in the military justice process.

In August 2013, the Secretary of Defense directed all of the Armed Forces to establish similar special victim's advocacy programs due to the success of the program, in which 100 percent of victims served reported being “extremely satisfied” or “satisfied” with the advice and support provided by their counsel. This followed a ruling from the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces in July 2013 affirming the right of victims in the Air Force to have an attorney present legal arguments regarding their rights to the court.

The Special Victims' Counsel Program also provides training for the Judge Advocate Generals who represent victims in the other services. The program has promoted respect and dignity for sexual assault victims while affording them meaningful participation in the justice system.

“We are humbled and proud to recognize these extraordinary individuals, teams, and organizations for their outstanding service” said Deputy Attorney General James Cole. “These

compassionate honorees have become beacons of hope for so many others who have endured shock and deep sadness in the face of too many incidents involving violence and loss.”

In addition to the U.S. Air Force’s Special Victims’ Counsel Program, the Department will recognize nine other individuals and programs for their outstanding efforts on behalf of crime victims. Descriptions and videos of the honorees are available at the Office for Victims of Crime’s Gallery: <https://ovcncvrw.ncjrs.gov/Awards/AwardGallery/gallerysearch.html>.

President Reagan proclaimed the first Victims’ Rights Week in 1981, calling for renewed emphasis on, and sensitivity to, the rights of victims. National Crime Victims’ Rights Week will be observed this year from April 6-12, and the theme is “30 Years: Restoring the Balance of Justice.”

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), headed by Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason, provides federal leadership in developing the nation’s capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at www.ojp.gov.