

Illinois Attorney General's Office
Violent Crime Victims Advisory Commission (VCAC)
Public Meeting Minutes
Date: Friday, December 12, 2025
Time: 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. CST
Location: Virtual (Zoom)
Chair: Dr. Kathryn Bocanegra

Attendance: Rachel Garthe, Edwin Galletti, Kathy Daniher, Maria Garza, Xochitl Guerrero, Melissa Ellison, Dr. Sonia Mathies-Dinizulu, Dr. Kathryn Bocanegra

Absent: Amanda Pyron, Erica Katava, State's Attorney Julia Rietz, Chief Lally

1. Opening and Welcome

- Theresa Geary opened the meeting with welcome remarks and acknowledged members and attendees. She reminded participants that VCAC meetings are public meetings governed by the Illinois Open Meetings Act and may be recorded.
- Ms. Geary provided a brief overview of meeting logistics, including the use of Zoom features, the structure of the agenda, and the opportunity for public comment at the end of the meeting.

2. Roll Call and Approval of Minutes

- Dr. Kathryn Bocanegra, Chair of the VCAC, conducted roll call and verified attendance. Quorum was achieved.
- Members reviewed the minutes from the previous quarterly meeting. No corrections were raised, and the minutes were approved.

3. Framing Remarks: Immigrant Crime Victims in Illinois

Dr. Bocanegra provided framing remarks to contextualize the meeting's focus on immigrant crime victims in Illinois.

- She situated the discussion within the broader responsibilities of the Commission to study and recommend improvements to policies and services affecting victims of violent crime under the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act. Dr. Bocanegra emphasized that immigrant communities represent a significant and longstanding part of Illinois' population and workforce, and that ensuring accessible victim services for these populations remains an important statewide priority.
- Dr. Bocanegra summarized several research findings and emerging trends affecting immigrant crime victims and their interactions with victim services and public institutions.
- Key points included:

- Illinois is home to approximately 1.8 million immigrants, representing roughly fourteen percent of the state’s population. Many households include both immigrant adults and United States citizen children. These demographic realities underscore the importance of ensuring that crime victim services remain accessible to immigrant families across Illinois.
 - Evidence from service providers and national research suggests that heightened immigration enforcement activity can suppress crime reporting among immigrant communities. Community based organizations and victim service providers have reported declines in reporting of crimes such as domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and workplace exploitation when community members fear that interaction with law enforcement could expose them or their family members to immigration enforcement.
 - Research also indicates that some offenders deliberately target undocumented or precariously documented immigrants because they are perceived as less likely to contact authorities. Qualitative interviews with active offenders have documented how immigration status and fear of deportation may be exploited to discourage victims from seeking help.
 - Concerns about immigration enforcement activity near public institutions, including courthouses and other government facilities, may discourage victims from participating in legal processes such as pursuing orders of protection or cooperating in criminal investigations. These dynamics can undermine both victim safety and the broader justice process.
 - Research further shows that when immigrant victims have access to culturally responsive services, clear information about legal protections, and trusted community organizations, reporting and help seeking behavior increases. Policies and practices that strengthen trust between immigrant communities and public institutions can therefore play an important role in improving victim safety and service access.
- These remarks framed the relevance of the day’s presentation and discussion regarding strategies to strengthen service access and institutional trust for immigrant victims across Illinois.

4. Presentation: Supporting Immigrant Crime Victims in Illinois

- Presenter: Fred Tsao, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)
- Mr. Tsao provided an overview of the mission and work of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and its partnerships with state agencies, including programs coordinated with the Illinois Department of Human Services.
- Mr. Tsao discussed the passage of the VOICES Act in 2018, legislation designed to address challenges immigrant victims face when seeking certification for U visas and T visas. The law requires law enforcement agencies to respond to certification requests

within specified timelines, generally within ninety days. The legislation was initially developed with support from law students at DePaul University and was intended to ensure greater consistency in law enforcement responses to certification requests.

- ICIRR continues to collaborate with the Civil Rights Bureau of the Illinois Attorney General's Office to monitor compliance with the VOICES Act and support oversight of implementation across jurisdictions.
- Mr. Tsao also discussed House Bill 1312, which was signed into law earlier that week by the Governor. The legislation establishes additional requirements for certain institutions regarding immigration enforcement activities.
- Key provisions discussed included requirements for hospitals and institutions of higher education to develop procedures outlining how immigration enforcement activities will be addressed. The law also creates mechanisms through which individuals may challenge certain arrests through the courts and allows grievances and potential penalties when rights violations occur.
- The legislation further restricts civil immigration arrests in court settings in order to support access to the judicial system for victims and witnesses.

5. Commission Year in Review and Attorney General Advocacy Updates Presenter: Christelle Perez, Illinois Attorney General's Office

- Christelle Perez provided an overview of updates related to the Violent Crime Victims Assistance program and broader advocacy efforts undertaken by the Illinois Attorney General's Office over the past year.
- Ms. Perez reviewed the VCVA grant program, including the application process, eligibility requirements, and the annual funding cycle. She also discussed the upcoming grant application window and administrative processes associated with the program.
- Ms. Perez then provided a year in review of advocacy initiatives undertaken by the Illinois Attorney General's Office related to crime victims and violence prevention. These efforts included policy engagement, coordination with community based organizations, and initiatives addressing barriers faced by vulnerable populations, including immigrant communities.
- Members were encouraged to review additional details about these activities through the Attorney General's annual reports and public updates.

6. Public Comment

- The meeting was opened for public comment. Members of the public were invited to provide remarks for up to two minutes per speaker.
- No formal public comments were recorded.

7. Closing Remarks and Next Steps

- Dr. Bocanegra thanked the presenters and Commission members for their participation and engagement in the discussion.
- She noted the importance of continued cross-sector collaboration to ensure that victim services remain accessible to all communities across Illinois.
- Members were informed that details regarding the next quarterly meeting will be shared by the Office of the Illinois Attorney General.
- The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.