



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

KWAME RAOUL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

December 17, 2025

RE: Annual Report of the Violent Crimes Advisory Commission

Dear Honorable Members of the Illinois General Assembly:

In consultation with the chairperson of the Violent Crimes Advisory Commission, Dr. Kathryn Bocanegra, I am pleased to provide this annual report in accordance with the Violent Crimes Victims Assistance Act (VCVA Act). [725 ILCS 240/5(8)].

Introduction

In accordance with the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act (725 ILCS 240), the Illinois Attorney General's Office submits this Annual Report summarizing the activities, deliberations, and recommendations of the Violent Crime Victims Advisory Commission (VCAC) during calendar year 2025. The Commission serves a statutory advisory role pursuant to 725 ILCS 240/5, including studying laws and practices affecting victims of crime, promoting research and analysis, coordinating victim service efforts, and recommending policies that strengthen victim recovery, trust in public institutions, and access to justice across Illinois.

Throughout 2025, the VCAC convened quarterly public meetings in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. Quorum was achieved at each meeting. The Commission drew on statewide data, national research, community-based expertise, and lived experiences to inform its deliberations. The year's work emphasized evidence-based prevention, equitable access to victim services, and responsiveness to emerging policy and funding challenges, consistent with the legislative intent articulated in 725 ILCS 240/2.

Membership and Commission Composition
Welcoming New VCAC Members

In 2025, the Commission welcomed newly appointed members whose expertise strengthened the VCAC’s statutory capacity to study, evaluate, and advise on matters affecting victims of violent crime pursuant to 725 ILCS 240/5(1) and 5(2). New members included:

- Edwin Galletti, Vice President of Violence Prevention at UCAN Chicago, with more than two decades of experience in trauma-informed prevention, intervention, and capacity building.
- Xochil Guerrero, Licensed Clinical Social Worker and doctoral student at the University of Illinois Chicago, with expertise in justice-informed practice and family impacts of incarceration.
- Maria Garza, Co-founder of Challenge to Change in Aurora, an advocate for restorative justice and survivor-centered community responses.
- Dr. Sonia Mathies Dinizulu, Licensed Clinical Psychologist and faculty leader at the University of Chicago, specializing in trauma, resilience, and culturally responsive care.
- Dr. Rachel Garthe, Director of the Violence Prevention Research Lab at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and lead author of the Illinois Violence Prevention Plan.
- Julia Rietz, State’s Attorney of Champaign County and adjunct professor at the University of Illinois College of Law.
- Chief Ana Lalley, Chief of Police of the Elgin Police Department.

Recognition of Outgoing VCAC Members

The Commission formally acknowledged and expressed gratitude to outgoing members who completed their terms of service in 2025. Their contributions advanced the VCAC’s work in promoting victim-centered policy, strengthening statewide coordination, and elevating community-informed perspectives in accordance with the Act's purposes. VCAC membership during 2025 reflected the statutorily required cross-sector composition outlined in 725 ILCS 240/4, including representation from law enforcement, prosecution, healthcare, higher education, victim advocacy, and public members with direct experience supporting victims of violent crime.

Overview of 2025 Quarterly Meetings

The VCAC convened four public meetings in 2025 pursuant to 725 ILCS 240/5(7). Each meeting included administrative updates from the Illinois Attorney General’s Office, framing remarks by the Chair, invited expert presentations, Commission deliberation, and public comment.

Across meetings, the Commission focused on five core areas directly tied to its statutory duties:

1. Studying the impact of federal funding cuts on victim services and violence prevention infrastructure in Illinois, consistent with 725 ILCS 240/5(1) and 5(6).
2. Examining state and philanthropic strategies to sustain trauma-informed, community-based responses to violence, consistent with 725 ILCS 240/5(2) and 5(6).
3. Reviewing data-driven approaches to preventing victimization across the life course, consistent with 725 ILCS 240/5(2).
4. Assessing the continuum between victimization and criminal legal system involvement to inform policy and funding recommendations, consistent with 725 ILCS 240/2 and 5(3).
5. Evaluating the impact of federal immigration enforcement on immigrant crime survivors and access to justice, consistent with 725 ILCS 240/5(1) and 5(6).

Federal Funding Cuts and Implications for Victim Services **Assessing the Federal Funding Landscape**

Pursuant to its authority under 725 ILCS 240/5(1) and 5(6), the VCAC examined the termination of federal Department of Justice grants and the resulting loss of resources for Illinois-based victim service providers and community violence intervention programs. Guest speakers Amy Solomon and Betsy Pearl of the Council on Criminal Justice presented national and Illinois-specific data, documenting substantial mid-award federal funding rescissions that affect victim services, community violence intervention, training, and technical assistance.

Commission discussions highlighted that Illinois experienced the loss of tens of millions of dollars in previously awarded federal funding, disproportionately impacting nonprofit and community-based organizations serving communities with the highest exposure to violence. Members discussed the implications for service continuity, workforce stability, and statewide capacity to meet the needs of victims.

State and Cross-Sector Response

Consistent with 725 ILCS 240/5(6), the VCAC examined strategies to encourage the development and maintenance of victim services throughout the state. Discussions emphasized the importance of state-level stewardship, cross-agency coordination, and partnership with philanthropy to mitigate federal disinvestment and prevent further harm to victims.

Data Driven Violence Prevention Planning **Review of the Illinois Plan for Violence Prevention**

In fulfillment of its responsibilities under 725 ILCS 240/5(2), the VCAC reviewed the Illinois Plan for Violence Prevention, presented by Dr. Rachel Garthe of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The plan synthesizes statewide and regional data to identify risk and protective factors associated with victimization and outlines evidence-based strategies to prevent violence and support recovery.

The commission's discussion emphasized regional variations in violence exposure across Illinois, the importance of primary and secondary prevention, and the role of cross-sector collaboration among health, education, justice, and community-based systems. The review reinforced the alignment between VCAC priorities and data-driven prevention strategies that address both immediate victim needs and long-term safety.

Expansion of VCVA Program Eligibility **Recognizing the Continuum of Harm**

Pursuant to 725 ILCS 240/5(3) and the legislative intent articulated in 725 ILCS 240/2, the VCAC examined extensive research demonstrating the overlap between victimization, chronic exposure to violence, and subsequent criminal legal system involvement. Presentations by Dr. Rachel Garthe and Edwin Galletti of UCAN Chicago highlighted evidence that individuals who have experienced violence are at elevated risk of future harm when trauma goes unaddressed.

Commission Vote and Recommendation

Following structured deliberation consistent with 725 ILCS 240/8(9), the VCAC voted to recommend that Violent Crime Victims Assistance funds be made available to programs that intentionally serve survivors whose prior experiences of violence may have contributed to criminal legal system involvement. The Commission further voted not to restrict this expansion to a specific demographic group, affirming statewide applicability. This recommendation reflects the VCAC's statutory responsibility to ensure that funding mechanisms promote recovery, prevent future victimization, and strengthen trust in public institutions.

Immigrant Crime Survivors and Access to Justice Acknowledging Heightened Vulnerabilities

Consistent with its duties under 725 ILCS 240/5(1) and 5(6), the VCAC devoted focused attention to the impact of intensified federal immigration enforcement on immigrant crime survivors in Illinois. Guest speaker Fred Tsao of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights presented on barriers faced by immigrant victims, including reduced reporting, fear of retaliation, and challenges accessing courts and services.

Commission discussions examined how enforcement-related fear can suppress help-seeking, disrupt trauma recovery, and undermine trust in public institutions, even in a state with strong statutory protections for immigrants. Members emphasized the implications for victim safety, accountability, and the credibility of the system.

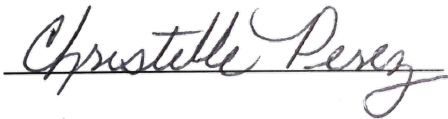
Policy and Practice Considerations

The VCAC identified the need for continued attention to clear communication regarding victims' rights regardless of immigration status, strengthened partnerships with trusted community-based organizations, culturally and linguistically responsive trauma-informed services, and cross-agency coordination to ensure that enforcement contexts do not exacerbate victimization.

Looking Ahead

As the VCAC enters the next year of work, the Commission remains committed to:

- Monitoring the ongoing impact of federal funding shifts on victim services.
- Supporting data-driven, prevention-oriented investment strategies.
- Advancing equitable access to trauma-informed services for all victims, including those historically underserved or marginalized.
- Strengthening statewide coordination to ensure that policies and practices promote recovery, trust, and long-term safety.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christelle Perez". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Christelle Perez
Chief, Violence Prevention and Crime Victim Services Division