

Your Voice, Your Strength

The Survivor's Guide to Victim Impact Statements

Defending
INNOCENCE

What is a Victim Impact Statement?

A victim impact statement is a written or oral statement made as part of the judicial legal process, allowing crime victims the opportunity to speak during the sentencing of the offender. This offers survivors a voice in the process, providing them an opportunity to express their feelings to the judge, detail the impact of the crime, and make a recommendation for the offender's sentence.

We understand that writing a victim impact statement can be an incredibly challenging task. It requires you to revisit some of the darkest moments in your life, to articulate the deep emotional, physical, and psychological effects that a crime has had on you. The process can bring up feelings of fear, pain, and even shame. Please know that it's okay to feel overwhelmed and take breaks as needed. Your feelings are valid, and this task is not easy. It's courageous to share your story, and remember, by writing this statement, you're taking a powerful step in your healing journey, voicing your truth, and standing up for justice. You're not alone; support is available throughout this process.

This guide is to help you organize your thoughts prior to writing your impact statement.

Before You Begin

Before you begin writing your Victim Impact Statement be sure to

1. Check with your Victim Advocate for Deadlines on when your statement is due (this is typically two weeks before the hearing date).
2. Check if you are able to read your statement aloud in court. In some jurisdictions if you submit a written statement, the judge will not allow

it to be read in court. In cases like this you can still be heard in court through a verbal statement, just bring notes.

3. Make sure you give yourself enough time to write your statement, this is a very difficult task to complete and you should give yourself time to take breaks while writing it. We recommend giving yourself at least a month to write it.
4. Know that your feelings and headspace may change throughout this process, but this document should reflect the hardest moments you faced because of these crimes being committed. Be completely honest with yourself and the court about how this crime has impacted you, do not hold back.
5. Know that while a victim impact statement is your opportunity to express the effect the crime has had on you, it should not include personal information about the offender not related to the case, any threats or hostile language towards the offender, or exact details of the crime that are not already part of the court record.

Describing the Crime

We understand how difficult and emotionally challenging it can be to revisit the details of a crime you've survived. However, in writing your victim impact statement, it can be powerful to describe the incident in a way that allows the reader to truly understand the gravity of what you've experienced. This doesn't mean you need to include every minute detail, but strive to convey the feelings, atmosphere, and significant events as clearly as you can.

The goal is to help the reader comprehend not just the facts, but the raw emotions you felt, the setting in which it happened, and the severity of the trauma you endured. It can be incredibly hard to relive these moments and we recognize your bravery in doing so. Remember, it's not about sensationalizing your experience, but about truthfully communicating the impact it had on your life. You are not alone in this process and there are resources available to help you through it.

When describing the crime, include key details of the incident, such as where and when it happened, the actions of the offender, the physical and emotional feelings you experienced, and the immediate effects.

Describing the Emotional Impact

When describing the emotional impact, articulate the feelings and emotions you experienced as a result of the crime, such as fear, anxiety, depression, or shame, and how these emotions have affected your daily life, relationships, and overall mental health.

Describing the Physical Impact

When describing the physical impact, mention any injuries you sustained from the incident, the pain you felt, the medical treatments required, any ongoing physical complications, and how these have affected your day-to-day life and overall health.

Describing the Financial Impact

Detail any financial losses as a result of the crime. This could include medical bills, therapy costs, property damage, travel costs or loss of earnings.

Describing the Social Impact

When describing the social impact, explain how the incident has affected your relationships with family, friends, and community, your ability to trust others, any changes in your social behavior, and how it has influenced your sense of safety and belonging.

Describing the Future Impact

When describing the future impact, share your concerns or fears about the future as a result of the crime, such as worries about personal safety, ongoing physical or emotional healing, changes in life goals or career path, and how the experience has shaped your outlook on life.

Closure

When writing your closure, summarize the main points of your impact statement, express any hopes or desires for the future, reiterate the need for justice, and if you wish, make a recommendation about the offender's sentence.

Remember, a victim impact statement is your chance to tell the court how the crime has affected you and your family. Speak honestly and from the heart. Be as clear and concise as possible, and most importantly, take care of yourself during this process. Writing about a traumatic event can be very difficult. Take breaks when you need them, and consider seeking support from a mental health professional if needed.