

GEORGIA VICTIMS' RIGHTS LAWS¹

Constitution

Georgia does not have a victims' rights amendment to its constitution.

Statutes

Title 17, Criminal Procedure; Chapter 17, Crime Victims' Bill of Rights **§ 17-17-1 – Legislative findings**

The General Assembly hereby finds and declares it to be the policy of this state that victims of crimes should be accorded certain basic rights just as the accused are accorded certain basic rights.

§ 17-17-2 – Short title

This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Crime Victims' Bill of Rights."

§ 17-17-3 – Definitions

As used in this chapter, the term:

- (1) "Accused" means a person suspected of and subject to arrest for, arrested for, or convicted of a crime against a victim.
- (2) "Arresting law enforcement agency" means any law enforcement agency, other than the investigating law enforcement agency, which arrests the accused.
- (3) "Compensation" means awards granted by the Georgia Crime Victims Compensation Board pursuant to Chapter 15 of this title.

¹ Not intended to be exhaustive.

- (4) "Crime" means an act committed in this state which constitutes any violation of Chapter 5 of Title 16, relating to crimes against persons; Chapter 6 of Title 16, relating to sexual offenses;

Article 1 or Article 3 of Chapter 7 of Title 16, relating to burglary and arson; Article 1 or Article 2 of Chapter 8 of Title 16, relating to offenses involving theft and armed robbery; Code Section 16-12-100, relating to sexual exploitation of children; Code Section 40-6-393, relating to homicide by vehicle; Code Section 40-6-393.1, relating to feticide by vehicle; or Code Section 40-6-394, relating to serious injury by vehicle.

- (5) "Custodial authority" means a warden, sheriff, jailer, deputy sheriff, police officer, correctional officer, officer or employee of the Department of Corrections or the Department of Juvenile Justice, or any other law enforcement officer having actual custody of the accused.
- (6) "Investigating law enforcement agency" means the law enforcement agency responsible for the investigation of the crime.
- (7) "Notice," "notification," or "notify" means a written notice when time permits or, failing such, a documented effort to reach the victim by telephonic or other means.
- (8) "Person" means an individual.
- (9) "Prompt notice," "prompt notification," or "promptly notify" means notification given to the victim as soon as practically possible so as to provide the victim with a meaningful opportunity to exercise his or her rights pursuant to this chapter.
- (10) "Prosecuting attorney" means the district attorney, the solicitor-general of a state court or the solicitor of any other court, the Attorney General, a county attorney opposing an accused in a habeas corpus proceeding, or the designee of any of these.

- (11) "Victim" means:

(A) A person against whom a crime has been perpetrated; or

(B) In the event of the death of the crime victim, the following relations if the relation is not either in custody for an offense or the defendant:

(i) The spouse;

(ii) An adult child if division (i) does not apply;

(iii) A parent if divisions (i) and (ii) do not apply;

(iv) A sibling if divisions (i) through (iii) do not apply; or

(v) A grandparent if divisions (i) through (iv) do not apply; or

- (C) A parent, guardian, or custodian of a crime victim who is a minor or a legally incapacitated person except if such parent, guardian, or custodian is in custody for an offense or is the defendant.

§ 17-17-4 – Designation of persons to act in place of victim during duration of physical disability

If a victim is physically unable to exercise privileges and rights under this chapter, the victim may designate by written instrument his or her spouse, adult child, parent, sibling, or grandparent to act in place of the victim during the duration of the physical disability. During the physical disability, notices to be provided under this chapter to the victim shall continue to be afforded only to the victim.

§ 17-17-5. Notice of accused's arrest, release, escape or violation of terms of release

(a) All victims, wherever practicable, shall be entitled to notification of:

(1) The accused's arrest;

(2) The accused's release from custody;

(3) Any judicial proceeding at which the release of the accused will be considered;

(4) An escape by the accused and his or her subsequent rearrest; and

(5) If the accused is released from custody and the terms or conditions of such release require that the accused participate in an electronic release and monitoring program, the accused's violation of the terms or conditions of the electronic release and monitoring program, provided that an arrest warrant has been issued for the accused and the accused is prohibited from contacting the victim.

(b) No such notification shall be required unless the victim provides a current address and telephone number to which such notice can be directed.

(c) The criminal justice agency having knowledge of an event described in subsection (a) of this Code section shall provide notice to the victim of such event. Such agency shall advise the victim of his or her right to notification pursuant to this chapter and of the requirement of the victim's providing a current address and telephone number to which the notification shall be directed. Such victim shall transmit the telephone number described in this subsection to the appropriate criminal justice agency or custodial authority as provided for in this chapter.

§ 17-17-6 – Information to be made available to victim upon initial contact by law enforcement and court personnel

(a) Upon initial contact with a victim, all law enforcement and court personnel shall make available to the victim the following information written in plain language:

- (1) The possibility of pretrial release of the accused, the victim's rights and role in the stages of the criminal justice process, and the means by which additional information about these stages can be obtained;
 - (2) The availability of victim compensation; and
 - (3) The availability of community based victim service programs.
- (b) The Criminal Justice Coordinating Council is designated as the coordinating entity between various law enforcement agencies, the courts, and social service delivery agencies. The Criminal Justice Coordinating Council shall develop and disseminate written information upon which law enforcement personnel may rely in disseminating the information required by this chapter.

§ 17-17-7 – Notification of victim by investigating law enforcement agency, prosecuting attorney, and custodial authority

- (a) Whenever possible, the investigating law enforcement agency shall give to a victim prompt notification as defined in paragraph (9) of Code Section 17- 17-3 of the arrest of an accused.
- (b) The arresting law enforcement agency shall promptly notify the investigating law enforcement agency of the accused's arrest.
- (c) Whenever possible, the prosecuting attorney shall notify the victim prior to any proceeding in which the release of the accused will be considered.
- (d) Whenever possible, the prosecuting attorney shall offer the victim the opportunity to express the victim's opinion on the release of the accused pending judicial proceedings.
- (e) Whenever possible, the custodial authority shall give prompt notification to a victim of the release of the accused.
 - (1) Prompt notification of release from a county or municipal jail is effected by placing a telephone call to the telephone number provided by the victim and giving notice to the victim or any person answering the telephone who appears to be sui juris or by leaving an appropriate message on a telephone answering machine.
 - (2) Notification of release from the custody of the state or any county correctional facility shall be in the manner provided by law.
- (f) If the court has granted a pretrial release or supersedeas bond, the victim shall have the right to file a written complaint with the prosecuting attorney asserting acts or threats of physical violence or intimidation by the accused or at the accused's direction against the victim or the victim's immediate family. Based on the victim's written complaint or other evidence, the prosecuting attorney may move the court that the bond or personal recognizance of an accused be revoked.

§ 17-17-8. Information to be provided to victim by prosecuting attorney; restitution information

(a) Upon initial contact with a victim, a prosecuting attorney shall give prompt notification to the victim of the following:

(1) The procedural steps in processing a criminal case including the right to restitution;

(2) The rights and procedures of victims under this chapter;

(3) Suggested procedures if the victim is subjected to threats or intimidation;

(4) The names and telephone numbers of contact persons at both the office of the custodial authority and in the prosecuting attorney's office; and

(5) The names and telephone numbers of contact persons at the office of the investigating agency where the victim may make application for the return of any of the victim's property that was taken during the course of the investigation, as provided by Code Section 17-5-50.

(b) If requested in writing by the victim and to the extent possible, the prosecuting attorney shall give prompt advance notification of any scheduled court proceedings and notice of any changes to that schedule. Court proceedings shall include, but not be limited to, pretrial commitment hearings, arraignment, motion hearings, trial, sentencing, restitution hearings, appellate review, and post-conviction relief. The prosecuting attorney shall notify all victims of the requirement to make such request in writing.

(c)(1) In the event the victim seeks restitution, the victim shall provide the prosecuting attorney with his or her legal name, address, phone number, social security number, date of birth, and, if the victim has an e-mail address, his or her e-mail address. The victim shall also provide such information, other than a social security number, to the prosecuting attorney for a secondary contact person in the event the victim cannot be reached after reasonable efforts are made to contact such victim. The prosecuting attorney shall advise the victim of any agency that will receive such information and advise the victim that he or she is responsible for updating such information with the prosecuting attorney while the case involving the victim is pending and that he or she should update the agency with such information after a restitution order has been entered.

(2) The prosecuting attorney shall transmit the information collected in paragraph (1) of this subsection to the Department of Corrections, Department of Juvenile Justice, or the State Board of Pardons and Paroles, as applicable, if an order of restitution is entered.

(3) The information collected pursuant to paragraph (1) of this subsection shall be treated as confidential and shall not be disclosed to any person outside of the disclosure provided by this subsection; such information shall not be subject to Article 4 of Chapter 18 of Title 50, relating to open records, or subject to subpoena, discovery, or introduction into evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding.

§ 17-17-8.1. Victim interviews and contact

(a) A victim shall have the right to refuse to submit to an interview by the accused, the accused's attorney, or an agent of the accused. It shall be the duty of the prosecuting attorney to advise a victim that he or she has the right to agree to such an interview or to refuse such an interview.

(b) If a victim agrees to be interviewed, such victim may set conditions for such interview as he or she desires. Conditions may include, but shall not be limited to, the time, date, and location of the interview, what other persons may be present during the interview, any security arrangements for the interview, and whether or not the interview may be recorded. If requested by a victim, the prosecuting attorney or his or her agent may attend the interview. A victim has the right to terminate the interview at any time or to refuse to answer any question during the interview.

(c) The accused, the accused's attorney, and any agent of the accused shall not contact a victim in an unreasonable manner; and if a victim has clearly expressed to any such party a desire not to be contacted, no contact shall be made. When making any permissible contact with the victim, the accused's attorney or an agent of the accused shall make a clear statement that he or she is contacting the victim on behalf of the accused.

(d) For the purposes of this Code section, a peace officer shall not be considered a victim if the act that would have made the officer a victim occurs while the peace officer is acting within the scope of the officer's official duties.

(e) Except as provided in this Code section, the prosecuting attorney shall not take any action to deny an accused's attorney access to a victim for the purpose of interviewing such victim.

§ 17-17-9. Victim's right to be present during court proceedings; separation of victims from accused and related parties

(Section effective January 1, 2013)

(a) A victim has the right to be present at all criminal proceedings in which the accused has the right to be present. A victim or member of the immediate family of a victim shall not be excluded from any portion of any hearing, trial, or proceeding pertaining to the offense based solely on the fact that such person is subpoenaed to testify unless it is established that such victim or family member is a material and necessary witness to such hearing, trial, or proceeding and the court finds that there is a substantial probability that such person's presence would impair

the conduct of a fair trial. The provisions of this Code section shall not be construed as impairing the authority of a judge to remove a person from a trial or hearing or any portion thereof for the same causes and in the same manner as the rules of court or law provides for the exclusion or removal of the accused. A motion to exclude a victim or family members from the courtroom for any reason other than misconduct shall be made and determined prior to jeopardy attaching.

(b) A victim of a criminal offense who has been or may be subpoenaed to testify at such hearing or trial shall be exempt from the provisions of Code Section 24-6-616 requiring sequestration; provided, however, that the court shall require that the victim be scheduled to testify as early as practical in the proceedings.

(c) If the victim is excluded from the courtroom, the victim shall have the right to wait in an area separate from the accused, from the family and friends of the accused, and from witnesses for the accused during any judicial proceeding involving the accused, provided that such separate area is available and its use in such a manner practical. If such a separate area is not available or practical, the court, upon request of the victim made through the prosecuting attorney, shall attempt to minimize the victim's contact with the accused, the accused's relatives and friends, and witnesses for the accused during any such judicial proceeding.

§ 17-17-9.1. Victim's communications

Communications between a victim, other than a peace officer, and victim assistance personnel appointed by a prosecuting attorney and any notes, memoranda, or other records made by such victim assistance personnel of such communication shall be considered attorney work product of the prosecuting attorney and not subject to disclosure except where such disclosure is required by law. Such work product shall be subject to other exceptions that apply to attorney work product generally.

§ 17-17-10 – Information concerning victim's address, telephone number, or place of employment not to be transmitted to defendant

As a condition of permitting a response to an inquiry as to the victim's current address, telephone number, or place of employment, the court may require counsel or any other officer of the court, including but not limited to counsel for the defendant, not to transmit or permit transmission to the defendant of the victim's current address, telephone number, or place of employment by the counsel or officer of the court or any employee, agent, or other representative of the counsel or officer of the court.

§ 17-17-11 – Victim's right to express opinion as to disposition of accused's case

The prosecuting attorney shall offer the victim the opportunity to express the victim's opinion on the disposition of an accused's case, including the views of the victim regarding:

- (1) Plea or sentence negotiations; and
- (2) Participation in pretrial or post-conviction diversion programs.

This provision shall not limit any other right created pursuant to state law.

§ 17-17-12. Notification of appellate proceedings by Attorney General

(a) Upon the written request of the victim, the prosecuting attorney shall notify the victim of the following:

(1) That the accused has filed a motion for new trial, an appeal of his or her conviction, or an extraordinary motion for new trial;

(2) Whether the accused has been released on bail or other recognizance pending the disposition of the motion or appeal;

(3) The time and place of any appellate court proceedings relating to the motion or appeal and any changes in the time or place of those proceedings; and

(4) The result of the motion or appeal.

(b) The Attorney General shall notify the prosecuting attorney of the filing of collateral attacks on convictions of this state which are being defended by the Attorney General.

(b.1) In cases in which the accused is convicted of a capital offense and receives the death penalty, the Attorney General shall:

(1) Notify the prosecuting attorney and upon the written request of the victim notify the victim of the filing and disposition of all collateral attacks on such conviction which are being defended by the Attorney General, including, but not limited to, petitions for a writ of habeas corpus, and the time and place of any such proceedings and any changes in the time or place of those proceedings; and

(2) Provide the prosecuting attorney and upon the written request of the victim provide the victim with a report on the status of all pending appeals, collateral attacks, and other litigation concerning such conviction which is being defended by the Attorney General at least every six months until the accused dies or the sentence or conviction is overturned or commuted or otherwise reduced to a sentence other than the death penalty.

(c) In the event the accused is granted a new trial or the conviction is reversed or remanded and the case is returned to the trial court for further proceedings, the victim shall be entitled to request the rights and privileges provided by this chapter.

§ 17-17-12.1. Block of inmate mail

(a) As used in this Code section, the term “mail” means any form of written communication, including, but not limited to, letters, cards, postcards, packages, parcels, and e-mail as defined by Code Section 16-9-100, text messaging, and any other form of electronic communication which is knowingly intended to be delivered to or received by a victim, any member of the victim's family, or any member of the victim's household.

(b)(1) A victim shall have the right to request not to receive mail from an inmate who was convicted of committing a criminal offense against such victim or was adjudicated by the juvenile court of having committed a delinquent act or designed felony against such victim.

(2) A victim's right to request not to receive mail from such inmate shall extend to any member of such victim's family or any member of such victim's household during the term of the sentence imposed or dispositional order for such offense.

(3) As soon as practical following a conviction or adjudication, a victim shall be provided with the instructions for requesting that inmate mail be blocked as provided in subsection (c) of this Code section. If the conviction is from a state or superior court, it shall be the duty of the prosecuting attorney to provide a victim with such instructions. If the adjudication is from the juvenile court, such instructions shall be provided by the juvenile court.

(c) The Department of Corrections and the Department of Juvenile Justice shall develop and provide to the prosecuting attorneys and juvenile courts, respectively, the procedures a victim shall follow in order to block inmate mail. Such procedures may include secure electronic means provided that an alternate, nonelectronic procedure is available for victims without access to a computer. Such departments shall also develop and implement appropriate administrative sanctions which shall be imposed against an inmate violating the provisions of this Code section.

(d) If a victim submits a request to block inmate mail, the Department of Corrections, in the case of an adult, or the Department of Juvenile Justice, in the case of a juvenile, shall:

(1) Notify any other custodial authority having actual custody of the inmate of the names and addresses of such victim and the family or household members denoted by such victim;

(2) Notify the inmate of the request to have mail blocked and advise the inmate that sending mail directly or through any third party to such victim or the family or household members denoted by such victim is prohibited and will result in appropriate sanctions and review of all outgoing mail; and

(3) Institute such procedures to ensure that the inmate cannot send mail directly or through any third party to such victim or the family or household members denoted by such victim.

(e) Any custodial authority having actual custody of an inmate with mail restrictions shall not knowingly forward mail addressed to any person who requests not to receive mail pursuant to this Code section.

(f) The imposition of sanctions by a custodial authority pursuant to this Code section shall not preclude the imposition of any other remedies provided by law, nor shall such sanctions bar prosecution of the inmate for any criminal offense which may have been committed in sending such mail.

(g) Notwithstanding the provisions of Article 4 of Chapter 18 of Title 50, information concerning the names and addresses of a victim, and the family or household members denoted by such victim, who requests that inmate mail be blocked shall not be open to inspection by or made available to the public and shall not be subject to discovery in any civil or criminal case or

administrative proceeding unless the court, after notice and a hearing, makes a finding of fact that such information is material and relevant to the case and that such information is not available from any other source.

§ 17-17-13 – Notification of victim prior to consideration of pardon, parole, or other clemency by State Board of Pardons and Paroles

The State Board of Pardons and Paroles shall give 20 days' advance notification to a victim whenever it considers making a final decision to grant parole or any other manner of executive clemency action to release a defendant for a period exceeding 60 days; and the board shall provide the victim with an opportunity to file a written objection to such action. No notification need be given unless the victim has expressed objection to release or has expressed a desire for such notification and has provided the State Board of Pardons and Paroles with a current address and telephone number.

§ 17-17-14 – Responsibility of victim to keep certain persons informed of victim's current address and phone number

- (a) It is the right and responsibility of the victim who desires notification under this chapter or under any other notification statute to keep the following informed of the victim's current address and phone number:
- (1) The investigating law enforcement agency;
 - (2) The prosecuting attorney, until final disposition or completion of the appellate and post-conviction process, whichever occurs later; and
 - (3) As directed by the prosecuting attorney, the sheriff if the accused is in the sheriff's custody for pretrial, trial, or post-conviction proceedings; the Department of Corrections if the accused is in the custody of the state; or any county correctional facility if the defendant is sentenced to serve time in a facility which is not a state facility; and
 - (4) The State Board of Pardons and Paroles.
- (b) Current addresses and telephone numbers of victims and their names provided for the purposes of notification pursuant to this chapter or any other notification statute shall be confidential and used solely for the purposes of this chapter and shall not be subject to disclosure under Article 4 of Chapter 18 of Title 50, relating to inspection of public records.

§ 17-17-15 – Failure to provide information or notifications

- (a) Failure to provide or to timely provide any of the information or notifications required by this chapter shall not subject the person responsible for such notification or that person's employer to any liability for damages.
- (b) Failure to provide a victim with any of the rights required by law shall not give an accused a basis for error in either an appellate action or a post-conviction writ of habeas corpus.

- (c) This chapter does not confer upon a victim any standing to participate as a party in a criminal proceeding or to contest the disposition of any charge.
- (d) The enumeration of these rights shall not be construed to deny or diminish other notification rights granted by state law.
- (e) The victim may waive any of the information or notification or other rights provided for by this chapter.

§ 17-17-16 – Temporary restraining orders and protective orders prohibiting harassment of victims or witnesses

(a) As used in this Code section, the term:

- (1) "Course of conduct" spans a series of acts over a period of time, however short, indicating a continuity of purpose.
- (2) "Harassment" means a course of conduct directed at a specific person that causes substantial emotional distress in such person.

(b) (1) A superior court, upon application of a prosecuting attorney, shall issue a temporary restraining order prohibiting harassment of a victim or witness in a criminal case if the court finds from specific facts shown by affidavit or by verified complaint that there are reasonable grounds to believe that harassment of an identified victim or witness in a criminal case exists or that such order is necessary to prevent and restrain an offense under Code Section 16-10-32 or 16-10-93.

(2) (A) A temporary restraining order may be issued under this Code section without written or oral notice to the adverse party or such party's attorney in a civil action under this Code section if the court finds, upon written certification of facts by the prosecuting attorney, that such notice should not be required and that there is a reasonable probability that the state will prevail on the merits.

(B) A temporary restraining order issued without notice under this Code section shall be endorsed with the date and hour of issuance and be filed forthwith in the office of the clerk of the court issuing the order.

(C) A temporary restraining order issued under this Code section shall expire at such time, not to exceed ten days from issuance, as the court directs. The court, for good cause shown before expiration of such order, may extend the expiration date of the order for up to ten days or for such longer period agreed to by the adverse party.

(D) When a temporary restraining order is issued without notice, the motion for a protective order shall be set down for hearing at the earliest possible time and takes precedence over all matters except older matters of the same character; and at the hearing, if the prosecuting attorney does not proceed with the application for a protective order, the court shall dissolve the temporary restraining order.

- (E) If on two days' notice to the prosecuting attorney or on such shorter notice as the court may prescribe, the adverse party appears and moves to dissolve or modify the temporary restraining order, the court shall proceed to hear and determine such motion as expeditiously as the ends of justice require.
- (F) A temporary restraining order shall set forth the reasons for the issuance of such order, be specific in terms, and describe in reasonable detail and not by reference to the complaint or other document the act or acts being restrained.
- (c) (1) A superior court, upon motion of the prosecuting attorney, shall issue a protective order prohibiting harassment of a victim or witness in a criminal case if the court, after a hearing, finds by a preponderance of the evidence that harassment of an identified victim or witness in a criminal case exists or that such order is necessary to prevent and restrain an offense under Code Section 16-10-32 or 16-10-93.
- (2) At the hearing referred to in paragraph (1) of this subsection, any adverse party named in the complaint shall have the right to present evidence and cross-examine witnesses.
- (3) A protective order shall set forth the reasons for the issuance of such order, be specific in terms, and describe in reasonable detail and not by reference to the complaint or other document the act or acts being restrained.
- (4) The court shall set the duration of effect of the protective order for such period as the court determines necessary to prevent harassment of the victim or witness but in no case for a period in excess of three years from the date of such order's issuance. The prosecuting attorney may, at any time within 90 days before the expiration of such order, apply for a new protective order under this Code section.
- (d) Article 5 of Chapter 11 of Title 9, relating to depositions and discovery, shall not apply to actions brought pursuant to this Code section.