

Statement of  
**The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
April 13, 2011

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),  
Chairman, Senate Committee On The Judiciary,  
Hearing On "Fulfilling Our Commitment To Support Victims Of Crime"  
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This week, we celebrate the 30th annual National Crime Victims' Rights Week. It is a time to recognize the losses suffered by crime victims and their families, and to acknowledge the hard work being done to help people rebuild their lives after tragedy hits. It would be cruel irony if this were the week the Crime Victims Fund was gutted, as was suggested in news accounts yesterday. No one should be contemplating raiding this vital resource for crime victims for some shortsighted, short-term advantage.

For nearly three decades, the Crime Victims Fund has played a central role in providing help to crime victims. We created the Fund in the Victims of Crime Act of 1984, and it has been the primary way that the Federal Government supports crime victims and their families. It funds state victim assistance and compensation programs that serve nearly four million crime victims each year. These services are priceless to the people they support, but they cost taxpayers nothing. The Crime Victims Fund is supported by fines and penalties paid by Federal criminal offenders, not by taxpayer dollars.

After the tragedy in Oklahoma City, I worked to ensure that there would be funds available to help victims of mass violence and to establish a "rainy day" reserve. Instead of distributing all of the funds collected the previous year, we have constructed a trust fund with deposits retained so that in leaner years, crime victims and their advocates are not left stranded without resources.

More recently, when some, including President Bush, sought to violate the crime victims' trust fund and steal the reserves, I worked hard, with Senators from both political parties, to protect the Fund and ensure that its reserves were preserved for their intended purpose, for helping crime victims. I remain committed to maintaining that reserve, while also ensuring that sufficient funds are released each year to meet increasing needs. No less than Social Security and other trusts that the American people have established, the Crime Victims Fund represents our commitment to crime victims. It should be respected and honored, not pillaged or treated as if it were no more than a convenient piggybank.

It is fitting that this Committee today considers what the Federal Government has been doing to support those whose lives have been affected by crime, and what more we can do to renew this vital commitment. These efforts have never been more important than they are today. Difficult

economic times have stretched state and local services, including victim services, to the breaking point. Families, made more vulnerable by financial stress, struggle more than ever to overcome the emotional, financial, and physical damage caused by crime, and they need help.

The theme of this year's Crime Victims' Rights Week, "Reshaping the Future, Honoring the Past," is appropriate. It is time to take stock of what we have accomplished in the past three decades, and determine what additional work lies ahead. As a country, we have made great strides in addressing the needs of crime victims, but we can do more.

Crime is changing, and our responses must adapt in turn. Complicated financial offenses are on the rise in the form of identity theft and mortgage fraud, and victims of these crimes have unique needs. The elderly, who make up an increasing population in many of our communities, are being targeted with greater frequency and often require specialized services to recover from abuse and exploitation. There is a greater need for legal services to help crime victims with housing and medical needs, immigration, and the financial consequences of crime. Transitional housing services are more essential than ever for crime victims in difficult financial times.

Also, as the criminal justice community becomes increasingly and appropriately focused on evidence-based practices grounded in scientific research, it is becoming ever clearer how much more data we need about crime victims - who they are, how they are victimized, what needs they have, and what services help. Comprehensive research will help states provide better services.

I know our witnesses have been thinking about these issues, and I look forward to learning from their experience. I am sorry that a family emergency has prevented Amy Farr, who serves as Victim Advocate in Vermont's Attorney General's Office, from testifying in person today. I look forward to her submitting written testimony. I also thank Robert Paolini, who is Chairman of the Board of the Vermont Center for Crime Victims Services, for attending today's hearing.

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