

Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistance

New Jersey's Transformational Approach to Public Safety



FACT SHEET

What is VIVA?

In September 2022, through an administrative directive, Acting Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin created a new Division within the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety, the Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistance (VIVA). VIVA will advance a unified strategy for public safety by bringing together victim services, including victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, and the Department's violence intervention and prevention programming. VIVA will centralize these services, which are presently dispersed throughout the Department, under one roof and provide staffing to support these programs statewide.

What is the significance of the VIVA?

The move marks a transformational step in how New Jersey approaches public safety. By creating this new Division and putting it on an equal footing with policing and prosecution work undertaken by the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) and the New Jersey State Police, the Department is making clear that New Jersey is putting community-based interventions and victim assistance at the center of our public safety approach alongside prosecution and policing.

Why does the Department of Law and Public Safety need VIVA?

To prevent future violence, the state must address the needs of victims in the aftermath of crime and trauma, and provide interventions to those likely to commit violent acts by:

- ensuring that our law enforcement officers are using trauma-informed approaches in their work;
- forging connections between front-line community-based services and police and prosecutors to address those who are at the highest risk of committing crime; and
- serving all victims of crime in ways that address their trauma and prevent retaliation or revictimization.

What will VIVA look like?

VIVA will be led by an Executive Director who will bring forth the vision of this unified approach.

The Victims of Crime Compensation Office (VCCO) will move to VIVA from its current placement within DCJ and will get the support and leadership of a victim-centered office. This will ensure that the focus is on a victim-centered approach, helping victims address their needs in the aftermath of crime.

The Office of Victim Support and Assistance will serve as the hub or home-base for the creation and implementation of victim-centered policy and training, leading coordination across the Department. It will provide the base from which to serve new victim populations currently not being served or who are being served in a limited capacity. In addition, the office will provide technical assistance and resources to communities so they can better address acts of violence, and provide advocates and victims with a place to raise concerns and bring feedback.

The state's innovative violence intervention and prevention programs (hospital based violence intervention and community based violence intervention) do not currently have any dedicated program staff or leadership. The Office of Violence Intervention and Prevention (OVIP) will be established to provide violence intervention and prevention programs (hospital-based violence intervention and community-based violence intervention programs) centralized, dedicated leadership to building and strengthening the innovative initiatives currently launched across the state. OVIP will drive the development and accountability of these approaches, and the work of OVIP will complement the efforts of law enforcement across the state.

The Office of Trial and Criminal Justice Process (OTCJP) will set policy for the existing State Office of Victim Witness Advocacy work with victims, and develop protocols and practices for Victim Witness Advocates across the state to comply with as they work with victims and survivors. This will promote consistency of services to survivors, and better position the state's Victim Witness Advocates to connect survivors to needed services.

What will VIVA mean for New Jerseyans?

VIVA will confront violence and victimization in communities, homes, and the criminal justice system. Victims of domestic violence or sexual assault will have VIVA as a resource to work through the court process, including interactions with police and prosecutors, to ensure that their experience with the criminal justice system does not retraumatize them, and that they have access to supports and solutions that are restorative.

VIVA will strengthen relationships between community groups and law enforcement agencies, so that victims and communities are treated as partners in the state's approach to public safety.

And VIVA will work regularly with law enforcement agencies and officers to supplement their essential work in ensuring public safety. This means connecting with community groups and stakeholders to undertake intervention-based strategies like street outreach, mediation, and conflict resolution that can help break cycles of violence.