



January 30, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing on behalf of the Vermont Victim/Survivor of Crime Council to express support for the passage of the Crime Victim Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. This Amendment to the Constitution is an important step toward, at the very least, the equal access to the justice system for victims of crime.

Our council is made up of many victims/survivors of many different crimes. Our Mission is to provide a bridge between people and communities who are directly affected by crime and the statewide systems, institutions and people whose work affects victim/survivors.

We know from personal experience just how frustrating it is to have to attend to the protection of the accused while struggling with our need to simply be acknowledged by our justice system. We know providing us with basic rights to participate will neither compromise nor interfere with the rights of the accused. We ask to be notified of our perpetrators proceedings in advance, to contribute at the hearing, to have our safety prioritized, to receive restitution for our losses, and to have court delays minimized. We know that a Constitutional Amendment can only grant these assurances. In fact, State amendments have done little to alter or enforce the imbalance of our justice system.

We feel the existence of an Amendment to the Constitution will help hold states accountable to our rights. The rights of the accused are a part of our country's Constitution. However, it still remains silent on the rights of victims and affords us no protection. In fact, our Federal Constitution, the "*supreme law of the land*," recognizes two-dozen separate Constitutional rights of the accused, including fifteen provided by *amendments* to the Constitution. At each stage of the criminal justice system our rights are barely enforced, and we have little recourse because of our laws and our Constitution.



Please understand that we are the people who are most affected when a crime occurs. Our lives change forever and we look to the justice system to, at the very least, include us, and attend to our rights as much as it attends to the rights of the accused, so that we may begin to rebuild our lives. We believe justice simply does not apply to us, without equality under the law.

Sincerely,

The Vermont Victim/Survivor of Crime Council
Co-Chairs MJ Bouchard & David Mulholland