

# How to Navigate the Criminal Justice Process in Philadelphia: A Guide for Immigrant Victims of Crime

SHARED SAFETY PHILADELPHIA

## If I am a victim of crime, can I report it to the police, even if I am an undocumented immigrant?

**Yes, undocumented immigrants can report crimes in Philadelphia.** City policies prevent city workers and police officers from sharing immigration information. Police officers should not ask the immigration status of a crime victim. Criminal court staff are also not supposed to report the immigration status of victims of crime.

However, if you are arrested for a crime, it might affect your immigration status. Speak with an attorney if you have questions.

## What happens after I report a crime?



### INVESTIGATION:

- A **defendant** is someone who is accused of committing a crime. The defendant may be arrested if the police see the crime. The police will then ask the victim for more details about what happened.
- When police do not see the crime, they will use the information you provide to investigate. This includes taking evidence, and if possible, making an arrest.
- A Victim Witness Coordinator from the DAO can help explain the court process. That person can also refer you to resources and help you through the court process.
- There may be several court dates scheduled before the criminal case ends.



### ARREST:

- After the police arrest the defendant, you can sign up to be notified if the defendant is released from jail or moved to a different place. Call VINE at 1-866-277-7477 to set this up.
- After the arrest, you will be notified of future court dates. It may take many court dates, over several months or years, for a case to resolve.



### COURT:

- As the person who experienced the crime, you are called the victim witness. The prosecutor asks the victim witness to come to court to testify about the crime. Testify means to say what happened to you. The victim witness is not on trial and does not need a lawyer.
- The Philadelphia District Attorney's Office (DAO) is the prosecutor. A staff member of the DAO should call you and send information by mail before the court date. You should call the DAO if you do not get information from them. Also, tell the DAO if your address or phone number changes after you report the crime. That way they will know how to contact you.



### AFTER THE CASE:

- The criminal case will decide if the defendant is guilty or not guilty of the crime. If the defendant is found guilty, the criminal case will also determine the sentence (punishment). The punishment may include jail time or probation.



### IMMIGRATION OUTCOMES:

- Immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes who cooperate with the police and prosecutors may be eligible for special visas to stay in the United States legally. This is true even if the defendant is not guilty. Contact an immigration attorney to see if you qualify for immigration relief that could help you gain lawful status in the U.S. Immigration remedies available to immigrant victims of crime could be U-Visas, VAWA Self-Petitions, T-Visas, Asylum, and others.
- If the defendant is not a U.S. citizen and is arrested or found guilty of a crime, their immigration status could be affected, and they might be deported. It depends.



## How should I prepare for court?

### The day of the hearing:

- Bring your subpoena with you.
- You can bring someone to court with you for support.
- You can request to sit in a special waiting room for victims of crime at both Family Court and Criminal Court. There, you can connect with the Victim Witness Coordinator or an advocate.

### Since the court process can be very long, you should:

- Eat before you go to court.
- Bring medicine you will need during the day.
- Arrange for childcare.

## HOW TO CONTACT THE PHILADELPHIA DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE (DAO)

For general questions or to talk to the prosecutor (Assistant District Attorney) regarding your case, call **215-686-8000**.

To contact the Victim Witness Coordinator assigned to your case, call **215-686-8027** or e-mail **DA.Victimservices@phila.gov**

**You have the right to an interpreter at court.** Use either of the above phone numbers to make sure the DAO requests an interpreter for you.

If the defendant or their family or friends contact you or harass you during the criminal case, this is called intimidation. This includes making threats to your family abroad. You should let the prosecutor or Victim Witness Coordinator know so they can help you and hold the defendant accountable. **Call 9-11 in an emergency.**

## RESOURCES

These neighborhood-based victim services agencies can help you learn about your rights and help connect you with resources.

### CENTER CITY VICTIMS SERVICES

215-763-3280  
Serving the 6th, 9th, 22nd Police Districts  
[cdvservices.org](http://cdvservices.org)

### EAST DIVISION VICTIM SERVICES

215-426-4810  
Serving the 24th, 25th, 26th Police Districts  
Or contact Congreso: 267-968-1813  
[congreso.net](http://congreso.net)

### NORTHEAST VICTIM SERVICES

215-332-3888  
Serving the 2nd, 7th, 8th, 15th Police Districts  
[nevs.org](http://nevs.org)

### NORTHWEST VICTIM SERVICES

215-438-4410  
Serving the 5th, 14th, 35th, 39th Police Districts  
[northwestvictimservices.org](http://northwestvictimservices.org)

### VICTIM/WITNESS SERVICES OF SOUTH PHILADELPHIA

215-551-3360  
Serving the 1st, 3rd, 17th Police Districts  
[vwssp.org](http://vwssp.org)

### WEST/SOUTHWEST VICTIM SERVICES

215-567-6776  
Serving the 12th, 16th, 18th, 19th Police Districts  
[avpphila.org](http://avpphila.org)

### WOMEN AGAINST ABUSE LEGAL CENTER

215-686-7082  
Serving victims of crime who experienced domestic violence  
[womenagainstabuse.org](http://womenagainstabuse.org)

### WOAR PHILADELPHIA CENTER AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE

215-985-3333  
Serving victims of crime who experienced sexual assault.  
[woar.org](http://woar.org)