



# BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Butte County Victim-Witness Assistance Center Now Located in District Attorney's Office**

OROVILLE - Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey officially opened the county's newly relocated Victim-Witness Assistance Center at a ribbon-cutting ceremony this morning. Ramsey said the center is evolving from a "truly great" program which started in the county's probation department in 1979 to an "even better" program with its newly remodeled and more accessible offices within the District Attorney's Office next to the Superior Court. He noted that with the "soft-opening" of the new location in January of this year, the center has already seen a 50% increase in walk-in traffic in its mission to serve crime victims in Butte County.

Ramsey said he began discussions with then Chief Probation Officer John Wardell last summer about moving the center from the probation department to the district attorney's office as a logical next step in the expansion of victim's rights in California. In 1979 the Butte County Victim-Witness Assistance Program was established in the Probation Department as result of the state funding 30 of the state's 58 counties to establish Victim-Witness Centers. In June 1982 California voters added a "Victims' Bill of Rights" to the state constitution which included a right not only to restitution from the wrongdoers for financial losses suffered as a result of criminal acts, but also a right for victims to be heard in criminal justice proceedings. The "Victims' Bill of

Rights" also established a victim's fund which is funded by fines on convicted defendants to reimburse crime victims for a number of costs which include such things as medical bills, counseling, lost wages and funeral and burial expenses. The fund is administered by the state Victim's Compensation Board.

The Butte County Victim-Witness Program applied for and receives grant funding which allows for the direct filing of victim claims through the local program to the state which speeds up the time in which victims are reimbursed. Only 20 counties in the state have agreements with the state which allows such direct filing. Butte County's program acts as a regional hub for other counties such as Glenn, Colusa and Sutter. Last year, from January to December, the Victim-Witness Program filed claims with the Victim's Compensation Board on behalf of 1,130 crime victims. The total amount paid to victims totaled \$1,107,419.

On November 4, 2008, the voters of the State of California further approved Proposition 9, the "Victims' Bill of Rights Act of 2008", also known as Marsy's Law, a measure that extended and reaffirmed the due process rights of victims and witnesses. Continuing legislation has focused on victims and witness rights which have led to the migration of victim witness programs throughout the state from probation departments to programs located in district attorney's offices.

Ramsey said moving the program to the District Attorney's office has reduced any duplication of service and allowed victims needs to be addressed in a timelier manner. Victims will also have greater access with where the program is located next to the courthouse.

Ramsey pointed out that trained "Victim Advocates" at the Center stand ready to assist victims with services such as:

**Crisis Intervention and Emergency Assistance**

**Resource and Referral Assistance**

**Orientation to the Criminal Justice System**

**Case Status and Disposition**

**Court Support and Escort**

**Property Return**

**Victim Impact Statements**

**Employer Intervention**

**Restitution Assistance**

Last year, the Victim-Witness advocates assisted 2,338 Butte County crime victims and witnesses.

Ramsey spoke to those present about his office's commitment and long time support of victims' rights with a guiding principle of "We are the voice for the victim when no one is listening." The DA also noted his office's mission statement: "**To do Justice, as no one is above the Law, nor beneath its protection**" fits with his new Victim-Witness Assistance Center mission to protect and serve crime victims.

"Anyone of us could find themselves the victim of a crime," Ramsey said. "If a victim is fearful or becomes discouraged with the criminal justice system, the whole system will grind to a halt. Every American has a stake in victims' rights. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' We hope today's Open House will help spotlight and educate the public about a program that truly cares about our victims, and will help encourage both victims and witnesses everywhere in our county."

For those needing help, or would like additional information the Butte County Victim-Witness Assistance Center is located at 25 County Center Drive, Suite 218 (second floor main county administration building) Oroville, California. Contact phone numbers are (530) 538-7340 or (530) 891-2812. Ramsey also used the occasion to launch a new website highlighting the services of the Center at [www.buttecounty.net/da/Victim.htm](http://www.buttecounty.net/da/Victim.htm).

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