



Michael Laval Riley

JULY 12, 1979–OCTOBER 7, 2008

By His Mother, Marylene Riley

The fact that my oldest son, Michael Riley, is gone still seems surreal as it did when I first learned that he had been shot and killed. To be awakened by a phone call in the early morning hours and informed that your child has been murdered is a nightmare for any parent; this was our family's reality. No words can express the pain and emptiness that my son's murder(s) has caused our family. We never thought in a million years that a tragedy of this magnitude would touch our family. Our lives will never be the same.

The last time I saw my son was roughly 8:00 pm on Monday, October 6, 2008. He came over to spend time with his father and me. He ate dinner and completed his homework assignments. Before he left for his apartment, we hugged and gave each other a kiss. This was a peculiar hug... in that it was very tight, and I could really feel the love behind it. I told my son, "I love you." He replied, "I love you too Mama." He then left for his apartment.

Michael went home where he would continue to do homework while accompanied by a female guest. According to the young lady, about midnight, Michael received a call from a friend. His cell phone showed that this was the last call received. The friend wanted Michael to meet him at some apartments less than ½-mile from Michael's own apartment. He hesitated to mention

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*Our Next Meeting
will be on Sunday,
November 12, 2023*

10:00 a.m.

*Loch Lomond Yacht Club
95 Loch Lomond Drive,
San Rafael, CA*

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CITIZENS AGAINST HOMICIDE

About Us

The majority of our CAH Board Members have lost a loved one to murder. We will never "get over" our tremendous losses, but we do "get through" the grief. Becoming proactive; assisting/supporting families throughout the most difficult time of their lives and guiding them through the complicated criminal justice system. We have joined together to create a voice for families of homicide victims.

CAH Objectives

- Assist families through the complicated criminal justice system;
- Act as Liaison between families and investigative law enforcement;
- Provide assistance with Parole Opposition Letters;
- Accompany families to parole suitability hearings (when possible);
- Provide trial and courtroom support (when possible);
- Facilitate Reward Billboards (when/where possible);
- Provide information on pending crime legislation

Protecting Your Own Interests

We cannot prepare for the devastating event that changes our lives forever. We can only react. You will need to know how to deal with the subsequent trial, sentencing and (today) the unavoidable parole hearings. CAH will help you take action to protect your own interests.

If you know of a family or friend who may need our help, please share the information we have provided here.

Location for Meetings

We hold bi-monthly meetings on the second Sunday of the month at Loch Lomond Yacht Club - 95 Loch Lomond Drive, San Rafael, CA. The meeting starts at 10:00 a.m. We encourage anyone interested to attend.

A Few Words From Jan

To all my family and friends here at Citizens Against Homicide, alas we have made it through another Summer and are now heading into Fall. Appreciating the subtle changes taking place; colors of the leaves and the early morning chill, I find myself truly believing that Fall will bring about many good and positive things to our lives. While my family is still recovering from a number of very painful and stressful events recently, I realize the necessity of focusing, too, on the very positive and good things in our lives. Some good is always present; we just need to open our hearts and minds to it. It may be the gift of having wonderful children and grandchildren, (of which I have many). All are loving, kind, thoughtful — I recognize how blessed I am.

I recently attended a family gathering to celebrate two birthdays (a 51-year-old and 17-year-old) and a going away party for a recent college graduate heading to Europe for a couple of months. The joy, the laughter, the banter along with the true expressions of love do not have a dollar value; it has a value in the heart. These are the moments that get us through the rougher times.

I had the privilege of attending mass at the high school where several of my granddaughters are currently attending. A portion of the sermon was about the crosses we must carry from time to time. I am sure every one of you reading this newsletter has had more than one cross to bear over the course of a lifetime. In his beautiful sermon, Father Andrew reminded us that sometimes seeing others struggling with their crosses, prompts us to put aside our own to help them. Sometimes it is natural to help someone else rather than think of

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Officers

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Citizens Against Homicide

The UPS Store
369-B Third Street, Box 303
San Rafael, CA 94901
Tel 415-455-5944 • Fax 415-721-0788
E-Mail: vctmsmurdr@aol.com
Website: www.citizensagainsthomicide.org

CAH Victim Advocate:

For advice regarding your individual murder case, 1-209-743-7033
cahadvocate@yahoo.com

Words From Jan

—cont. from page 2

our own cross. Such a simple thought yet it resonated with me in such a strong way. It reminded me of why Citizens Against Homicide is here. We are here to help each other carry our crosses. Many hands will make the cross as light as a feather and, while doing so, everyone benefits by helping each other.

On August 4th we had our 29th Annual Golf Tournament Fund Raiser. CAH and I personally want to thank each and everyone who attended and/or donated to this wonderful event. It was a great success in bringing together so many “old” friends, (I was able to collect many more hugs than I thought belonged to me). So many smiles! The event was also a financial success. We matched our “best year ever” in raising funds. These funds will give us the ability to continue our Newsletters, as well as helping families and friends of victims, working on parole opposition letters and so much more. Our two most recent projects are 1) taking on the road our Domestic Violence Documentary, “*Left in the Dark*”. We believe this is a must see, possibly life-saving documentary; and 2) to continue working with various police departments to help offset the cost of processing DNA evidence—particularly in those counties that “do not have the funds”.

Those last few words “**do not have the funds**” has once again stirred a “fire in my belly”. During the 80’s and early 90’s, we worked tirelessly





to bring value to the voices of families and friends of murder victims. Since that time, everything has changed for the worse. Victim voices have gone virtually ignored by Governors, law makers, mayors, etc., who have no sense of caring or compassion for Victims nor their families and friends. All which we had accomplished is now slipping through political cracks. We no longer have support in Sacramento or Washington. So now, we must become proactive! We must seek out those candidates who have that “fire in their belly”, who care about Victim Rights and who have the desire to support we the people in Sacramento. We need to bring our faces and our demands by way of our hometown legislators. We need to get involved; we need to be ready to fight; to make change.

We start with finding legislators who care about victims—Do you know one? If so, please bring

him or her to our next meeting on November 12th. You have some time to talk with people. We desperately need those individuals who really care and are willing to stand with us. I will provide breakfast for all.

Will you accept the challenge? LET’S MAKE A CHANGE!!!

—Love you all, Jan



\$100,000 REWARD

FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST AND CONVICTION OF THE PERSON(S) WHO MURDERED

DENNIS PALMER

ON AUGUST 3, 1987

CONTACT
AMADOR COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE
(209) 223-6515

1,000 one hundred dollar bills

Dennis Palmer (age 33) lived with his girlfriend at his home on Middle Bar Road in Jackson, CA. On August 3, 1987, Palmer's girlfriend left for work from the residence at approximately 6:30 a.m. Palmer was still in bed at the time, but mentioned that he was thinking about visiting his parents in Alpine County later in the day. When she returned home from work, Palmer was gone as was his pickup truck. After he failed to return, his girlfriend contacted his parents, who advised he never arrived at their residence.

Friends of Palmer's were notified of his disappearance and began conducting a search of the area during the week, but were unable to locate him.

On August 10, 1987, the Amador County Sheriff's Office continued their search. Finally, on August 20, 1987, the body of Dennis Palmer was discovered in a mine shaft on his property. Someone holds the key to the mystery of Dennis Palmer's disappearance and death. It is time to come forward. Please contact the Amador County Sheriff's Office at (209) 223-6515 and/or Victim Advocates/Consultants Citizens Against Homicide (209) 559-5445 • (209) 743-7033 www.citizensagainsthomicide.org Dennis, his family, and friends deserve answers and justice!

Michael Riley

—cont. from page 1

that he had homework and that he would not be going out for the rest of the night. The calls continued and Michael decided to go out. He did not feel threatened, because he did not take either of his registered weapons. He did not even take his identification card, which was not like him. He was expecting to return within a short period of time. Michael told the young lady, "I'll be back." To this day, we do not know how he was persuaded to leave his apartment.

Michael drove his car and parked in a parking lot, then walked to the apartments to meet this friend. Why he parked his car then walked and what took place after remains a mystery.

Residents reported that they heard 7 to 9 gunshots. A 911 emergency call was made; police arrived and called the ambulance. He had been shot three times and lay in a muddy flower bed in front of the apartment complex along Loughborough Avenue. The area was only a few yards from a Merced Police Department substation. Upon arrival, the paramedics tried to revive him. He had no pulse in his neck and



a faint pulse in his wrist. He was pronounced dead when paramedics reached the hospital.

Authorities believe that the murder was "personal" due to the fact that all the bullet casings were found in the same vicinity. Witnesses reported that a car left the apartments at a high rate of speed. It was also reported that at least three individuals were in that car.

My family and I cooperated with the authorities from day one. We honored their every request to include releasing Michael's personal

computer so that they could obtain any pertinent clues. We informed them of all leads, names, etc. that we came across in hopes that the case would be solved. We continue to keep our voices in the media. We believe that Merced is too small of a town and the outpouring of statements are too great for the case to be unsolved.

The so-called "friend" who called my son out of his home has not yet contacted our family to offer any condolences, nor did he attend the funeral services. I would like to know from him what happened to my son and where he was at the time that Michael was murdered.

Michael was a wonderful son, brother, uncle and friend. He was a gift from God. He brought joy into my life and made me very proud. He was a quiet, private and studious person who was dedicated to everything that encompassed his life—family, friends, school, and people in general. He was very modest; he never boasted about his accomplishments. During his 29 years of life, Michael had many great accomplishments.

He was a U.S. Navy veteran. He enlisted on September 26, 2000. He was assigned to the USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71), ported in Norfolk, Virginia. He served during two wars: Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. In addition to the USS Theodore Roosevelt, his assignments included: Naval Air Station, San Diego, California, and Naval Air Station Lemoore, California. Michael separated on January 25, 2007.

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**\$ 50,000
REWARD**

DETECTIVE KALVIN HAYGOOD
MERCED POLICE DEPARTMENT
(209) 385-6998
OR
TIP LINE:
(209) 385-4725

FOR INFORMATION LEADING TO THE ARREST
AND CONVICTION OF THE MURDERER(S) OF
MICHAEL LAVAL RILEY

Michael Riley

—cont. from page 4

(Michael enlisted into the Navy to defend his country. He served in two wars on foreign land only to come home and be killed in the same streets in which he was raised.)

Michael would then enroll at Merced Community College in Merced, California. He majored in Political Science. His ultimate goal was to attend Harvard University and become a lawyer. He said, "Too many people get railroaded through the legal system because they lack the resources needed for proper representation." His interests included: African American history, activism, nature, poetry, photography, philosophy, law, politics, sociology, civil liberties, and debating.

On April 12, 2008, Michael was inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society. He was currently holding a leadership position as Vice President of Public Relations for Phi Theta Kappa at Merced College. Michael maintained a 4.0 grade point average. In May 2008, he attended the Merced College Scholarship Banquet where he was the recipient of two scholarships. At the time of his untimely death, he was scheduled to attend a scholarship banquet on Friday, October 10, 2008, at Merced College.

My son was my hero, my warrior and my investment. Although our hearts still experience great pain, we are prayerful that the person(s) involved in Mike's murder will one day be caught. We rest assured knowing he is in the presence of the Lord.

If anyone has any information regarding the murder of Michael Riley, please contact Detective Calvin Haygood, Merced Police Department at (209) 385-6998.

When Michael was murdered, my youngest son, Marlis Riley, really took it hard. His older brother Michael was his best friend. Losing his older brother at the hands of another did not sit well with him. He was very disappointed and felt that the system had failed. I witnessed a dramatic emotional change in my son. On September 12, 2009 (10 days after his 27th birthday) my son Marlis was killed, another victim of violence. While at a house party an altercation occurred; a 39-year-old male knocked him out three different times. While down he was then choked by a second male (who was currently on parole). Alcohol was involved. In Marlis' murder case, there were no witnesses to speak on his behalf. As a result, the suspects plea-bargained and received a mere four years for involuntary manslaughter.

My son Marlis was a father of two young children, a 9-year-old daughter named Lajae and a 6-year-old son name Zaire. Marlis had returned to school and received his high school diploma (GED) in July 2009. He enrolled at Merced College the following August. He was also my gift from God. We rest assured knowing he is in the presence of the Lord.

We love and miss both, Michael and Marlis. We are



very proud of both of them. Marlis will never see justice served to Michael's murder(s). They remain running the streets to take other lives. Meanwhile, Marlis' murders only receive a slap on the hand. Where is the justice?

14th ANNUAL RILEY BROTHERS VICTIMS' REMEMBRANCE WALK

Please Join Us!

There will be a Remembrance Walk in honor of family & friends who lost their lives in the Merced Community, near the Loughborough area.


Participants will walk from FoodMaxx parking lot, cross Olive Avenue and continue down Meadows Avenue.

We will stop at each site and have a prayer. Those who are unable to walk may drive alongside walkers.

Date:
Saturday, October 14, 2023

Time:
12:00 Noon

Meeting Place:
FoodMaxx Parking Lot
1300 W. Olive Avenue • Merced, CA 95348



The following opinion/article was recently forwarded to us by a dear friend of CAH, Dudley Sharp. As Victim Advocates, we share in Tiffany Attrill's frustrations and feel every painful word she writes here. This is truth—This is our world at the moment. However, feel rest assured, giving up on the rights of victims, no matter how many roadblocks, is not something CAH could ever entertain.

Opinion

Why I Can No Longer Work on Behalf of Crime Victims

Tiffany Attrill, Seattle Times, Sep. 22, 2023

It seems like, every day, there are headlines and news stories about multiple shots fired, more gun violence and homicides on the rise in Seattle and King County. I cannot resist reading and listening to these stories, because violence and homicide were a part of my everyday professional life for nearly a decade. I have seen and heard firsthand the pain, anguish, trauma, and horror the victims and their families experience in the aftermath of such horrendous crimes.

For the last 10 years I was a victim advocate—answering questions, explaining the criminal justice system process and providing information and resources for victims/survivors of violent crime and surviving family members of homicide victims.

I held sacred the trust victims and families gave me as I served as their guide and navigator. I viewed it as a privilege and honor that victims and families allowed me to share their darkest of days.

A few months ago, I quit. I couldn't do it anymore because of the shameful failings of the system: the politics, the blame-shifting, the excuse-making, the enabling, the anger and blame directed at victims and survivors.

The blatant disregard and shockingly horrible treatment of crime victims got the better of me and I gave notice. I left because I could no longer work in a system where victims' voices were being silenced and ignored in the legal system. My hope in writing this is that I can provide a victim's perspective, as one who was on the inside, of what is and has been happening.

The voices of victims no longer inform the process, despite the fact that this right is enshrined in our state Constitution, which mandates that victims of crime and their survivors are to be treated with dignity, respect, courtesy, and sensitivity by law enforcement, prosecutors and judges in a manner "no less vigorous than the protections afforded to criminal defendants." (RCW 7.69.010)

Over the years, I've witnessed a shift in how victims are perceived and treated. The current climate is one in which if a victim or family does not support alternatives to incarceration for the offender, they are viewed as not caring about systemic inequities that disproportionately affect communities of color and of being blind to racial injustice.

Some victims/survivors and families are pressured to conform to this offender-centric model, and when doing so conflicts with their personal thoughts and feelings about the sentence the offender should receive, they become quiet.

All of us process grief, and heal, differently. Thus, there is no wrong or right way victims/survivors and families should feel. They should be able to honestly express how they feel, without judgment or pressure.

We need to stop making excuses and enabling criminal behavior if we are to truly honor the spirit of what it means to support the rights of victims. Accountability

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Opinion

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is the cornerstone of justice, and this entails an offender taking responsibility for their actions, recognizing the harm they've caused and understanding the profound impact it has on their victims.

Offenders may choose not to do this, but once convicted, either by a guilty plea or a jury's verdict, they need to be held accountable by the court system.

What I have heard from victims and families is they want justice—they want the offender to be held accountable, to take responsibility for their choices, behaviors and actions.

Victims yearn for their offenders to be truly remorseful and to prove it by changing their behavior so that no other family will ever suffer at their hands again.

Families also want a swift resolution, not a drawn-out, several-years-long process of delays and rescheduled court dates that create an emotional roller coaster.

I've heard some pretty cringeworthy comments directed at victims and families. Statements that shrink and silence them. I've heard comments from judges directed at homicide victims' families such as: "You should put yourself in the shoes of the defendant, he had a rough childhood" and "Victims like the status of being called a victim."

Judges are allowing hours of supporting statements on behalf of a defendant to be read aloud in court, while allowing mere minutes for a victim impact statement. This practice of focusing on the plight of offenders while ignoring the trauma they inflicted silences the people the criminal justice system is supposed to protect.

In the juvenile division, I am aware of a senior deputy prosecutor who purposefully did not obtain victim input when negotiating a plea resolution on a serious violent felony case.

His plea offer was a drastic reduction in the seriousness of the charges, a resolution he knew the victim would not support. Despite representing to the court that the plea was reached with victim input, no such conversation occurred.

This sort of blatant violation of the Victim Bill of Rights silences victims. I've seen numerous friends, family, community groups and elected officials attend sentencing hearings in support of a defendant, and say things like:

"He is not defined by his worst bad act" (despite the defendant's multiple violent felonies, including murder convictions); "He is here because the system failed him"; and

"He is only 24 years old, and his brain isn't fully developed" (suggesting he is less culpable and should be sentenced to less time).

This, too, silences victims.

There is a spotlight on legal system reform right now. We must recognize and acknowledge the victim experience by holding individuals, community organizations that claim to provide mentoring opportunities, restorative justice programs, community leaders and elected officials accountable and to demand transparency.

And while it is certainly true that the constitutional rights of offenders must be vigilantly protected in the legal system, victims and their families have rights under our Constitution, too.

Among those rights are that they will be treated with kindness and respect—that their voices be heard.

When those voices are silenced or ignored by the very people entrusted with supporting the Constitution, the legal system has failed the people it exists to serve.

Tiffany Attrill was a victim advocate for over 25 years. She has worked for the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and was appointed to the Washington State Criminal Sentencing Task Force in 2020.

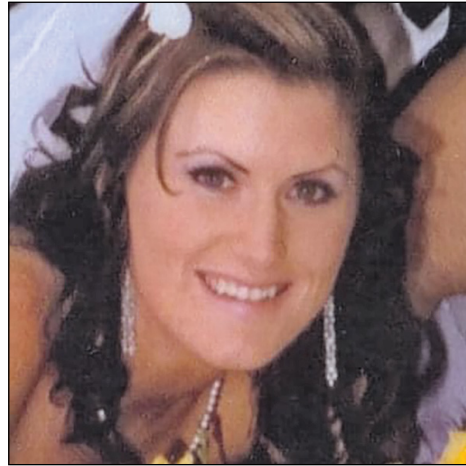
I Can Finally Breathe

Hello, my name is Angela Gillam, and I am a proud Victim Advocate for Citizens Against Homicide. I contacted this organization in 2007 when my 29-year-old daughter, Jennifer Bushnell, was murdered by her boyfriend of only five months.

My life was suddenly changed forever. I was a complete mess and had no idea what to do or who to turn to. I knew nothing about the criminal justice system. The Detective in charge of my daughter's murder investigation did his best to keep me updated, but the information he shared was limited; so much was being kept confidential. How could anything having to do with Jennifer's murder be "confidential"? This is my daughter and I wanted answers. There was no question as to who killed her. He shot her four times at a gas station in Flag City, and everything was captured on video cameras. He fled the scene, was finally captured one and a half months later in Mexico and returned to face trial for murder.

The trial process was so hard for me to sit through— seeing all of his rights, while we had almost no rights. He was finally convicted and sentenced to 80 years to life. I was "PROMISED" he would never get out. He would have to serve 85% of his sentence and would be 105 years-old before coming up for a parole hearing.

Then came another slap in the face with the "Elderly Release Program". I instantly knew that one day all



of my energy would need to be concentrated on keeping him behind bars. I was already planning for the future—the largest letter writing campaign that I could put together to keep him from ever being granted a parole consideration date. I was also preparing my own victim statement letter, which I have re-written so many times I have lost track. I have worried and agonized about this for 16 years!

Then, on the morning of September 5, 2023, I received an email from The Office of Victim and Survivor Rights and Services, and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. They were notifying me that my daughter, Jennifer's murderer was dead as of September 5, 2023. No explanation of how or why, but later I found out he died in his prison cell from an illicit drug overdose. As I read this email, I felt like I couldn't breathe, and all I could think of was "Is this real"? After about an hour, I pulled myself together, and I made the appropriate calls to verify that it was true. The only emotion I felt

was absolute relief. I realized that all my worries about fighting to keep him behind bars were finally over now and I could concentrate on remembering the beauty of my Jennifer. He will definitely be forgotten, and I will never speak the name of David Bernel ever again. Since my daughter was killed, my two biggest fears were that he would eventually be paroled, and Jennifer would be forgotten. I will continue to do everything I can to keep her memory alive.

Citizens Against Homicide helped me through every step of the process and I could never have made it through all of this without them. I have been part of two educational documentaries, dealing with domestic violence; one for the San Joaquin County, District Attorney's Office and one that Citizens Against Homicide created "Left in the Dark" (which we hope to take nationwide). I am confident this documentary will help save the lives of many others in the future.

I want to thank Citizens Against Homicide, and to everyone who helps to support them. They truly are an extra special organization who have become more like family to me. Thank you for taking the time to read my experience so far. God bless all of you and all of your lost loved ones. Sincerely, Angie Gillam, Jennifer Bushnell's Mom

Amador County Cold Cases

Citizens Against Homicide is featuring the following cold cases in an effort to obtain information which would assist the Amador County (California) Sheriff's Office in their investigation of unsolved homicides or missing person cases.



STEVEN LEE STAFFORD

On April 7, 1997 Steven Lee Stafford (20 years old) was working on a construction job site in the area of Pioneer near Highway 88. Stafford reportedly got into an argument and walked off the job site without anyone seeing him leave. At the time he left, Stafford was reportedly wearing blue jeans, a gray and blue flannel shirt and ankle high boots.

A missing persons report was taken at the time and a search of several locations was conducted. A missing persons bulletin was distributed throughout the county and to surrounding agencies.

On December 21, 1997, a hiker discovered human skeletal remains in the steep wooded area of the Mokelumne River canyon, below River Road. At autopsy, the remains were identified as those of Stafford. The cause of death was determined to be a blunt force trauma to the head.

Anyone with information into the death of Steven Stafford is encouraged to contact the Amador County Sheriff's Office at (209) 223-6515.



GLORIA SHOMLER

During the evening hours of January 11, 1987, the victim, Gloria Shomler (33 years old), along with her husband Brian and their two young children were at their residence in Pioneer. While the two children went upstairs and went to bed, the victim and her husband remained downstairs. According to Brian Shomler, he left for work after his daughters went to bed for the night.

The two daughters told deputies that when they awoke early on the morning of January 12th, they went to their parents' bedroom and found their mother in bed. When the daughters could not wake her, they went next door and told their grandmother. At approximately 0740 hours, the Amador County Sheriff's Office received a call reporting the death of Gloria Shomler. When deputies arrived at the Shomler residence they found Gloria Shomler lying on her bed and she was deceased. A subsequent autopsy determined Gloria died as a result of stab wounds to the chest and abdomen.

The evidence and interviews have not, to date, led to the arrest of the person or persons responsible for this murder. The case still remains open and the Amador County Sheriff's Office is asking anyone with any information to contact the Sheriff's Office at (209) 223-6515.

Quote of the Month



JUST BREATHE.

You are
strong enough
to handle your challenges,
wise enough
to find solutions to your problems,
and
capable enough to do whatever
needs to be done.

—Lori Deschene

Unclaimed Restitution

English

Were you the victim of a crime and the court ordered you restitution? The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation may have collected money for you. Contact the Office of Victim and Survivor Rights and Services to inquire if you have unclaimed money from a direct order of restitution. To update your address or to obtain additional information, call CDCR toll free at 1-877-256-6877 or visit <https://unclaimedrestitution.cdcr.ca.gov/>.

Spanish

Si usted fue victima de un crimen y la corte le otorgo restitution, es posible que el Departamento de Correcciones y Rehabilitacion haya recibido dinero a su favor. Llame a la oficina de Victimas y Sobrevivientes para preguntar si usted tiene restitution que no se haya reclamado. Para obtener mas informacion, llame gratis al 1-877-256-6877 o visitar <https://unclaimedrestitution.cdcr.ca.gov/>.

How can you request compensation for travel costs to a parole hearing?

The Office of Victim and Survivor Rights and Services has funds available through a federal grant which allows for reimbursement to victims and next-of-kin for costs associated with travel to parole hearings.

For information on how to apply for travel reimbursement contact OVSRS at 1-877-256-6877.

