

*Remarks to the
Crime Victims Rights Week Press Conference
April 25, 2002*

National Crime Victims Rights Weeks

provides us with an opportunity to reflect on those who have come face to face with evil and found the strength to persevere.

As Governor, one of my priorities for Mississippi is to ensure the safety and security of our people. We're making progress in reducing the crime rates in the state, but there are still too many who suffer. They need and deserve our help.

As Gary has said, laws have been passed guaranteeing victims constitutional rights. During the 2002 session, I signed several bills designed to enhance the rights of victims. Legislation such as Senate Bill 2562 increases the benefits and services offered through the Crime Victims Compensation Program.

I'd like to thank Representatives Reecy Dickson, Mary Ann Stevens, Percy Watson and Senator Hillman Frazier for their leadership in the passage of Senate Bill 2562.

We are focusing our efforts on providing continued support and assistance to crime victims. The Mississippi Department of Public Safety, through its Division of Public Safety Planning, provides grant funds each year to victims' advocacy groups around the state. They also provide financial assistance to the Crime Victim Compensation Program.

Other existing programs, such as the Division of Victim Services within the Department of Corrections, provide crime victims access to inmate information if the inmate is under the authority of the Department.

The Division of Victim Services provides referral services, counseling and support groups, and crisis intervention. Since its creation in November 2000, more than 613 crime victims have registered with the agency, and more than 2,400 individual requests have been completed.

With the new laws enacted this year, victims of domestic violence will receive added safety and protection. And, by lowering the legal DUI limit to .08, lives will be saved.

This year's theme, "Bringing Honor to Victims," offers an opportunity for us to reinforce the fact that no one deserves to be a victim of crime, and all victims deserve basic rights and services.

We must move the concept of victim's rights and services from being a "privilege" to a fundamental right due to all those who suffer as victims of crime.

As part of our effort to redefine this concept, I am proud to declare the week of April 21-27 as *Crime Victims Rights Week* in Mississippi.

I urge all Mississippians to use this week to reaffirm their commitment to provide respect, understanding and help for crime victims, during this week and throughout the year.

Thank you.