

Support the *Courtney Wild Reinforcing Crime Victims' Rights Act*

Led by Reps. Debbie Wasserman Schultz and Burgess Owens

The *Courtney Wild Reinforcing Crime Victims' Rights Act* was spurred by Courtney's courageous lawsuit that asserted the rights of scores of victims who fell prey to Jeffrey Epstein, and who were kept in the dark as federal prosecutors hashed out a secret and shockingly lenient plea deal. Courtney fought in court for over 10 years before a Federal District Court finally declared that her rights, and the rights of other victims of the serial sexual predator under the Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA), were violated. However, in April 2020—not long after Epstein committed suicide in jail—the Eleventh Circuit narrowly rejected her lawsuit. The Court ruled, in part, that because the government never filed charges against Epstein, the CVRA was never triggered.

Congress always intended for victims like Courtney to be protected, even before charges were formally filed in court. The sponsors of this legislation believe these rights are encompassed in current law; however, based on cases like Courtney's, this bill is necessary to ensure there is no ambiguity in the law and all crime victims are afforded their rights under the CVRA.

In response, U.S. Reps. **Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)** and **Burgess Owens (R-UT)** are leading the *Courtney Wild Reinforcing Crime Victims' Rights Act* to ensure victims of crime are treated with dignity, have the support they need while navigating criminal proceedings, and, above all, avoid further victimization. This legislation will specifically empower the Attorney General to issue the necessary regulations to implement the following reforms:

1. Explicitly assert that victims of federal crimes and crimes committed within the District of Columbia are entitled to certain rights, which attach prior to the filing of a complaint, investigation, or indictment.
 - a. Government attorneys will be required to provide crime victims a card listing these rights, including contact information for legal services and attorneys that are available pro-bono and have familiarity with crime victims' rights.
 - b. Allow attorneys to appear on behalf of a crime victim or crime victim's lawful representative in the court in which a defendant is being prosecuted.
2. Clarify that these victims have the right to be informed in a timely manner of any plea agreement, pretrial diversion agreement, or the referral of a criminal investigation to another law enforcement entity that could impact their ability to secure justice.
3. Reorganize the Office of Crime Victims' Rights under the independent supervision of the Inspector General of the Department of Justice to receive and investigate complaints relating to the provision or violation of the rights of a crime victim.

4. Require the court to order a just and appropriate remedy if a victim's rights have been violated, including allowing them to confer with government attorneys and request the annulment of a non-prosecution agreement.
 - a. Allow victims to submit complaints directly to the Office of the Crime Victims' Rights Ombudsman of the Department of Justice.
 - b. Entitle crime victims who prevail in an action to enforce a right to an award of reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses.
5. Require training for employees and offices of the Department of Justice engaged in the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crimes in trauma-informed methods and practices to ensure DOJ is responding more effectively to the needs of crime victims.
6. Require reports on handling of crime victims' rights complaints, particularly in cases where an attorney has been the subject of multiple complaints, to provide for oversight.

Please contact Max Price (max.price@mail.house.gov) from Rep. Wasserman Schultz's office to cosponsor or endorse this bill, or with any questions.