

Alaska Needs a Mass Violence Plan Focused on *Victim Assistance*

Mass violence incidents occur throughout the world and too frequently in the United States. There were more mass shootings in the United States in 2019 than there were days in the year, according to a gun violence research group. Last year, the United States had the highest number of mass shootings since the group began tracking. By the end of 2019, there were 417 mass shootings, according to data from the nonprofit Gun Violence Archive (GVA), which tracks every mass shooting in the country. GVA defines a mass shooting as any incident in which at least four people are shot, excluding the shooter. Thirty-one of those shootings were mass murders. Among the 417 shootings, several were high profile mass casualty attacks, including—



- A kosher grocery store in Jersey City, New Jersey;
- The French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana;
- A high school in Santa Clarita, California;
- The historic district of Dayton, Ohio;
- A Walmart in El Paso Texas;
- A playground hosting a community festival in Brooklyn, New York;
- The Gilroy Garlic Festival in the San Francisco Bay Area, California; and
- A municipal building in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

[It is highly probable a significant incident will occur in our state.](#)

Planning is essential, and already in the works...

 All states have emergency management plans for natural disasters, but very few incorporate services and support to victims of mass violence. Having a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach that includes a victim service plan for mass violence incidents will provide a comprehensive guide for state and local victim service agencies that respond to these tragedies. The needs will be great, the resources will be limited. Planning will lessen that divide.

 Mass violence plans can be part of an emergency management plan or a stand-alone plan. A mass violence plan differs from an emergency management plan in that the incident is an intentional violent criminal act investigated by law enforcement. Those individuals killed, injured, or harmed by emotional and psychological trauma will have many needs. Additionally, these victims are entitled to victims' rights under state statute.

Support and resources from outside the state are not immediately available. Community readiness in Alaska is essential.

Alaska Victim Assistance Partnership (AVAP) Efforts

State or community plans differ by the unique needs of the individual community, but there are common characteristics that all plans contain. AVAP has begun establishing partnerships among victim services, state, and other agencies to work together and create a communication plan and a mechanism for sharing information associated with mass violence incidents. **AVAP has obtained the assistance of an Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) Consultant** through the OVC Training and Technical Assistance Center. Goals for the upcoming year include increasing and formalizing—

Partnerships Communication Coordination Protocols Donation Management Recovery Services

AVAP's Goal is to Enhance Existing Emergency Management Plans

A victim assistance plan is designed to complement, not replace, existing emergency response plans. Emergency management plans typically do not address the complexity of the human element that comes in to play during and after an incident of mass violence or terrorism. Incidents of mass violence and terrorism generally include the following components—

- Intentional criminal act
- Formal law enforcement investigation
- Mass casualties and physical injuries as a result of a crime
- Emotional and psychological injuries as a result of a crime
- Increased need for crime victim assistance and compensation to help access services and financial resources
- Coordination with the District Attorney or U.S. Attorney's Office

Progress on an Alaska Victim Assistance Plan

Partnerships and planning began in Alaska 2 years ago through a Task Force initiated by the FBI Victim Service Division–Anchorage Field Office. Established partnerships make a response much more effective, but organized protocols and committed resources must be determined by state leaders. Victims deserve outstanding services that are provided in an efficient way. A victim assistance plan provides for an effective response and sufficient resources. The Office for Victims of Crime, part of the Office of Justice Programs at the U.S. Department of Justice, created a toolkit to help states develop a plan to respond to mass violence incidents <https://www.ovc.gov/pubs/mvt-toolkit/>.

The Alaska Victim Assistance Partnership consists of a multidisciplinary team from numerous programs. Many AVAP partners operate at a direct service level, so guidance and leadership from state programs are necessary to formalize planning.

Goals for the Next Year of Planning

There are multiple phases of a victim assistance plan. During the initial deployment, victim service representatives may respond to the scene and establish a **Family Information Center**. At these locations, services such as crisis counseling, death notifications, case management services, victim compensation, information and referral, and emotional assistance animals are provided.

Following the immediate response, an ongoing response and a recovery phase begins. This is when the Family Information Center transitions to a **Recovery Center**. Recovery Center services include a 24/7 phone number, website, behavioral health services, and addressing the needs identified by victims and their families.

Determining Plans and Protocols

- I. Establish partnerships, these are vital when a mass violence incident occurs
- II. Community readiness, which requires everyone to be at the table
- III. Victim assistance strategy, capacity for an effective response, and sufficient resources
- IV. Victim assistance protocols, which can be used onsite and for the recovery process:
 - a. Communications Protocol so that victims get information in a timely manner, allowing their questions to be answered
 - b. Family Information Center Protocol so that responders and victims know what services will be offered, have a plan for when the FIC should transition to a community recovery/resilience center, and whether the center will be temporary or permanent
 - c. Victim Identification Protocol and Notification Protocol
 - d. Identification of Grants and Emergency Funding Assistance
 - e. Volunteer Management, a designation of who is responsible for deploying them (e.g., American Red Cross) and ensuring that volunteers are screened adequately and their credentials are checked quickly and thoroughly
 - f. Donation Management (Funds, Goods & Services), including having an established method for how donations will be collected, how goods will be stored and distributed properly, and how services will be provided to those in need (donations and equitable distribution of funds is often a significant challenge without clearly established guidelines)
 - g. Criminal Justice System-Victim Support Protocol
 - h. Victim and Community Recovery Options
 - i. Media Management Strategy to help shield victims and family members from intrusive media

How You Can Help

Victim assistance plans are a key part of any emergency plan. The time to develop a plan is before a mass violence incident occurs. Victims deserve the best possible services a state or community has to offer. There is only one opportunity to provide a meaningful, well-coordinated response to victims of mass violence incidents, and that can only be done with planning, partnerships, and commitment. Please join AVAP and help prepare.

AVAP Partners Include:

- Emergency Planning Managers
- State, Regional, and City Government Officials
- Law Enforcement Officials
- Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Crime Victim Compensation Administrators
- Prosecutors' Offices
- Victim Service Providers
- Mental Health Providers
- Schools & Activity Programs
- Medical/Hospital Personnel/ Medical Examiners
- Language Interpreters
- Nonprofit Agencies, such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, United Way
- Special Population Partners, such as Disability, Elderly, Refugee, LGBT-Focused Programs
- Religious Leaders & Volunteers



Leadership within State Departments is needed.

To learn more information, or to be included on AVAP emails, meetings, and teleconferences, please contact: Erin Terry, FBI Victim Specialist: enterry@fbi.gov or 907-265-8203