

DA Vance Join Survivors of Crime and Advocates at 27th Annual Crime Victims

Candlelight Vigil

April 22, 2012

Good Afternoon. It is my great honor to welcome all of you to the 27th Annual Crime Victims' Candlelight Vigil.

This year's theme is "Honoring Victims, Supporting Families." Today, we remember the countless lives lost to senseless violence, reaffirm our unwavering support of victims and their families, and remind the public about the true cost of crime to our society.

Thank you Reverend Bos and the congregation of the West End Collegiate Church for welcoming us here today.

I also thank the Downstate Coalition for Crime Victims and the Joyful Heart Foundation. The positive impact you've made on the lives of countless survivors has been extraordinary, and I thank you for your dedication, leadership, and advocacy.

Thank you also to New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, our partners in law enforcement, providers of victim support services, and the many volunteers and participants who worked so hard to organize this ceremony.

And to survivors of crime and your loved ones - we hope that today's vigil brings you a measure of comfort. Each victim's story is unique, but by sharing your experiences with each other, I hope you will be reminded that your support network stretches far beyond your immediate circle.

We in law enforcement know that our job is not just about prosecuting cases. Equally important is our duty to help victims recover and rebuild their lives. This includes staffing cases with specially trained prosecutors in the Special Victims Unit and counselors in the Witness Aid Services Unit. But in all our efforts, we know that the partnership between my Office and the many individuals and organizations here today is critical. Everyone in this room—service providers, victims' rights advocates, law enforcement officers—we are all committed to working with you, your families, and with each other to help you in any way we can.

Let me share one example that demonstrates the importance of partnership. Last month, we achieved a significant victory when the Governor signed the All Crimes DNA legislation. This law, which will expand the state's DNA databank to include convictions of all penal law crimes, will help us to solve cases, take dangerous criminals off the street, and bring justice and closure to many victims.

The passage of this live-saving bill was only possible because of the tireless efforts of many people here. It was the result of your refusal to give up even when, year after year,

the bill stalled in the state legislature. And it was the result of survivors of crime sharing their compelling stories with legislators and with the public.

One of our brave victims, Jessica Reyes, came with me to Albany last spring to meet with lawmakers so that they understood in human terms what the prior, ill-written law meant for innocent victims. Jessica was brutally attacked in the stairwell of her Manhattan building the day after her 15th birthday in 2004. At under 5 feet tall, Jessica was able to beat off her attacker as he attempted to rape her, drawing a few drops of his blood, which was left at the crime scene. He escaped. But as we do frequently now in unsolved crimes where we have a suspect's DNA, the DNA profile from the attacker was itself indicted for attempted rape and attempted murder, but it matched no one in our database.

For years the crime went unsolved, and as many of you can relate to, Jessica lived with scars on both her face and her psyche. And then, six years later, a match came back. This was good news for Jessica, but it came at a cost – her attacker's DNA was only collected following his conviction in another brutal attack, this time on an elderly man. The most distressing fact, which plainly demonstrates the need for uniform DNA collection: during the years Jessica lived in fear with her attacker on the loose, he had been in our courthouse, just a few floors below my office, and convicted time after time on misdemeanor charges that were not DNA eligible. Beyond sparing Jessica years of anxiety, the fix to the law would have also prevented the attack on the elderly man.

A partnership emerged, as brave victims like Jessica spoke out, joined by advocates, law enforcement and the wrongfully convicted. Governor Cuomo voiced his strong support of the measure, and bipartisan sponsors took up the bill in both houses. And last month, that partnership produced the All-Crimes DNA Databank. This law — I guarantee you — will save lives by solving old cases and preventing those offenders from re-offending, as well as exonerate the innocent.

I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of this special ceremony. I look forward to continue working with advocates, service providers, and partners in law enforcement to make our city safer, and to strengthen our support network for victims and their families.

I am now pleased to introduce to you Sydney Boone, who will deliver the Solace Stone Message.