

# *Executive Officer's Statement*

May 15, 2008

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- **Marsy's Law Proposes to Transform Victims' Rights in California**

Last year we marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the California Victims' Bill of Rights, which was established through a ballot initiative known as Proposition 8. This initiative established important constitutional rights for victims of violent crime.

Recently, signatures have been gathered to qualify a new initiative for the November ballot called the "Victims' Bill of Rights Act of 2008: Marsy's Law." The initiative is named after Marsy, a 21-year-old college senior at U.C. Santa Barbara who was preparing to pursue a career in special education for handicapped children. She was murdered on November 30, 1983. Marsy's Law was written on behalf of her mother, father and brother, whose experience with the criminal justice system caused them to conclude they had no rights as victims of crime.

It's important to know the elements of this initiative. It will, for the first time in California, give victims constitutional rights that will include the following specified rights:

- To be notified of proceedings.
- To be present when the defendant has the right to be present.
- To be heard at critical stages of the criminal justice process, before the defendant is released after arrest, before a plea bargain is accepted by the court, before any sentence is imposed, before there is a parole hearing, and any time the victim's rights are at issue.
- To have the victim's safety considered before any release decisions are made and to be notified when the offender is being released or has escaped.
- To protect a victim's confidential records from disclosure to defendants.
- To refuse to submit to interrogations by the defendant or his lawyer before the trial.
- To confer with the prosecutor.
- To be free from intimidation, harassment, or abuse, and to be treated with fairness and respect for the victim's privacy.
- To a speedy trial and to reasonable finality.

We look forward to keeping the Board updated on the progress of Marsy's Law.

- **VCGCB Participates in Sexual Assault Awareness Month**

As part of April's Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) and the California Legislative Women's Caucus sponsored Denim Day California. On Wednesday, April 23, many individuals here at VCGCB joined others throughout the state to raise awareness about sexual violence by breaking the dress code and breaking the silence by wearing denim to work. VCGCB staff also joined CALCASA, legislators and partners at the Capitol that day to sign a pledge to work against sexual violence. I was among those to sign the pledge. Denim Day began in 1999 as part of an international protest to an Italian High Court decision to overturn a rape conviction because the victim was wearing jeans.

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**Awareness Campaign**

**The VCGCB participated, or will participate, in the following events and meetings:**

- Meeting of the Victim Compensation Committee of the California Crime Victim Assistance Association at VCGCB headquarters in Sacramento.
- Provider Information Forum in Redding for members of the local chapter of the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.
- Provider Information Forums in Los Angeles, Fremont and Northridge for mental health providers who provide services to victims of crime.
- Provider Information Forum at the Board of Behavioral Sciences offices in Sacramento for their licensees who provide services to victims of crime.