

# Community- and Systems-Based Advocates

Community-based advocates (CBAs) and systems-based advocates (SBAs) both provide specialized, valuable support to crime victims. CBAs operate outside of a government entity and provide a range of support services; SBAs generally operate as part of a law enforcement agency or prosecutor's office and help victims navigate the criminal justice system and understand their rights. CBAs' and SBAs' partnership and communication provide invaluable support to victims throughout the criminal justice system.

## Community-Based Advocates

- ◆ Belong to a nongovernment entity that is generally part of a not-for-profit agency.
- ◆ Offer several services, which may include counseling, short- and long-term care, guidance, accompaniment, and a host of other victim-centered services depending on the organization.
- ◆ Victims generally do not need to participate in the criminal justice process to receive these services.
- ◆ Can offer privileged and confidential communications in many cases, depending on the state.

## Systems-Based Advocates

- ◆ Belong to a law enforcement agency or government agency.
- ◆ Interact with victims if they report a crime and participate in the criminal justice process; SBAs usually do not communicate with victims of unreported crimes.
- ◆ Serve as liaisons and guide victims through the criminal justice system<sup>1</sup> and ensure that they are aware of their rights.
- ◆ Do not offer privileged and confidential communications in most cases, depending on the state.

## Why We Need Both

Community- and systems-based advocates complement each other by working together to ensure victim needs are met within the criminal justice system and in victims'

everyday lives. Both types of advocates and their teamwork are necessary and benefit sexual assault victims, their families, and the community at large.

CBAs generally support crime victims and their families, even if a crime goes unreported. Individual victims have different needs; CBAs respond to these needs in the most appropriate way, which may include directing victims to other outlets for support. Community-based advocates will be there when a victim's needs arise—whether that's immediately following an assault, a period of time after the assault, or years down the road. They can help victims understand the implications and benefits of reporting the crime, if the victims have not yet done so, and can help them through that process—before, during, or after—if the victims choose to report.

SBAs serve as part of the victim's support network during the criminal justice process. SBAs have a unique perspective working within the law enforcement agency and can help the victim understand the process to ensure that the victim's rights are understood and met. They can also help liaise between law enforcement officers and victims to keep the lines of communication open. SBAs often refer victims to community-based advocacy organizations if victims are not already in contact with a CBA. This combined approach ensures all victim needs are met.

### AND, not VERSUS

- ◆ CBAs generally support crime victims and their families, even if a crime goes unreported.
- ◆ CBAs will be there to assist victims immediately after the assault or years down the road.
- ◆ SBAs serve as part of the victim's support network during the criminal justice process.
- ◆ SBAs provide information about a victim's rights and help the victim understand the criminal justice process.

<sup>1</sup> The criminal justice system includes the prosecutor's office and law enforcement.