

## THE LAURA FLANDERS SHOW

### JUSTICE STARTS WITH STUDENTS

**CAMI ACHURY:** The United States has been known to incarcerate more people than any other nation in the world. Overall, the incarceration rate in the U.S. has skyrocketed in the past decade- the U.S. leads the world in the total number of people incarcerated, with more than 2 million prisoners nationwide, with China as the second contender with less than 1.7 million. Simultaneously, victims of violent crimes, like domestic violence and assault, are suffering due to lack of treatment which typically results in paying the price for the prison's failure to deliver safety. Anyone can be a victim of physical violence, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, or class. More than 12 million women and men over the course of a single year are victims of rape, physical violence, and stalking. To put this more into perspective, that estimates to be about 24 people per minute who become victims. For the past decade, the Common Justice Organization has been committed to telling the truth about violence regarding the survivors, the offenders, and how they're working towards ending it. In New York City, they operate the first alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program in the United States that focuses on violent felonies in the adult courts. Locally and nationally, they leverage the lessons from direct service to transform the justice system through partnerships, advocacy, and elevating the experience and power of those most impacted. Today, I am joined with Emma Taverner, an intern working with the Common Justice Organization, who has been advocating and recruiting advocates for victim compensation in hopes of passing bills to hold people accountable for harming others, break continuous cycles of violence, and secure safety, healing, and overall justice for survivors and their communities.

We can kick off the conversation with you, telling us a little bit about yourself and the organization you're interning for.

**EMMA TAVERNER:** So my name is Emma. I am a senior at John Jay. So I'll be completing my bachelor's in Law Society, with a double minor in criminology and interdisciplinary studies. So I am currently interning at Common Justice. So, Common Justice is an alternative to incarceration organization focusing on violent felonies. They mostly focus on their direct service programming. I work on the organizing and policy side of Common Justice. So what that means is that I am focusing on organizing and advocating for their bills that they're interested in. My mentor is the assistant director of organizing, and I also work with the other fellow organizers, and we focus on the fair access to Victim Compensation campaign. It is a campaign focusing on expanding victim compensation for victims and survivors of violence. So currently, there are 3 components to getting compensation from the OVS- the Office of Victim Services. One of them is you have to report the crime to police in order to obtain that evidence for OVS. And we want to expand that type of evidence to anyone the victim feels comfortable with. That

could be a medical provider such as a nurse or doctor anyone that they feel comfortable of and that could be evidence for OVS views. And then the other 2 have to do with timing. Right now you have to file a report within one week of your crime. We want to expand it to a reasonable time, because you never know what circumstances that victim is going through. It could take more than a week for them to report a crime and to file a claim with OVS. You have to do it within one year, and we want to expand it to 3 years. Same thing- you never know how people cope, or what circumstances they're going through. So one year is just a very limited time for victims and survivors. A lot of work and a dedication to building a community, and so that includes outreach organizing out all on the streets, asking people if they know about this bill educating them, and then all preparing for a day called Advocacy Day, where we all go up to Albany and visit our elected officials and see if they want to support or co-sponsor the bill. So basically that's what I've been doing my entire year at common justice, learning more about the bill and seeing ways of how we can increase the community for it.

**CA:** Are there any personal stories or stories that you've heard that relate to the topic of victim compensation?

**ET:** So another side of my work I'm. In justice I decided to create Common Justice X John Jay Student Activism Internship where I wanted to recruit as many students who have either been a victim of a crime or in is interested in advocacy and organizing, or just overall, wants to learn more about ways that they can use their voice within their community. So this program was able to teach them about the Fair Access to Victim Compensation and then thus allow them the chance to go up to Albany and release all the things that they've learned. So one of the students I've met- she is a mother herself, and unfortunately, the father of her child was killed in a crime. And she did not know anything about victim compensation, and it was really by chance, actually, we were tabling at John Jay and she happened to be walking past. I asked her if she knew anything about it. Some compensation, she said, No. What is this like? What do you guys doing here? What it? What do you guys? Why do you guys do this? And we explain all about Common Justice and the Victim Compensation campaign. She was like "This is like a message sent from heaven, like I really needed this. This is something that opened up my eyes to everything that- in my community that I didn't know that could happen." And she knew where she was from like what district she was who represented her, and she found out that they don't support this bill, or they probably don't know this bill. So she said, hey, like I can use my story, and I can influence them to support this bill and I- just her saying that like, put a smile on my face because it's basically the whole essence of what I wanted to do. Have a student that really didn't know anything about this. realize that they have everything to do with this, and then is using their storing, using their voice to influence politics and policy in general. And her story is an original right, like a lot of people get killed. A lot of people have been harmed, whether they have their homes broken into, or they are robbed, or they are assaulted right. But they just don't know about the resources that are out there for them. because no one tells them.

**CA:** Thank you for sharing Emma. Have the bills that support the Fair Access to Victim Compensation campaign been passed already? If not, could you tell us a little bit about the process of how the bill is passed?

**ET:** The fair access to victim Compensation campaign was passed in the assembly. However, it was not passed through the Senate, and if you know anything about politics, it has to get passed through both houses. And if it doesn't get passed through one, It has to basically go through the whole cycle again. We tried our best to get gain more support in the Assembly. We aren't so much worried about it getting passed in the Assembly this session around, but more so, we focused on passing it through the Senate. And that's where all the advocacy comes in. Things like phone banking and texting and going up to Albany and going face to face with them, just asking for their support.

**CA:** One of the components of the original bill is reporting the crime to the police. The newly proposed bill would allow medical professionals to provide proof so the victims and survivors wouldn't need to go directly to the police. So, could you explain why people would have an issue or fear talking to the police department in general?

**ET:** That's a great question. So right now, in our political climate, there is a lot of like distrust, really, with the police and law enforcement. This bill helps a lot of black and brown communities because statistically, they have been at the forefront of being survivors of crimes, not only black and brown communities but the LGBTQIA+ community. They just don't feel supported by law enforcement. So going to them is a very big obstacle. We're not taking away the power that people can go to the police officers if they feel comfortable with them. That's definitely still an option for a large amount of communities, because I know that some communities still do trust the police. And that's okay. That's completely fine. But there- we can't ignore the fact that historically black and brown communities, and the LGBTQIA+ community, has been at the lowest of the importance of law enforcement's list. As the statistics of OVS, from the start of 2018 through the end of 2020, Black, Latinx, and American Indian/Alaskan Native victims were less likely to be awarded compensation than white people when controlling the age, gender region, type of crime and year of crime. So this bill would create like a social equity between all races. The LGBTQIA victims/survivors often fear reporting to the police. Eleven percent of LGBTQIA+ survivors of intimate partner violence saw, said that law enforcement was hostile towards them while they reported a crime. And not only black and brown communities and the Lgbtqi plus community, immigrant victims and survivors may fear calling the police as it results in the person who is harmed being deported. Black victims represented 31.6% of all claims for compensation, but 49.7% of all award denials for failure to corroborate with law enforcement. So, to expand it to people that they trust specifically is a real huge win for them.

**CA:** What crimes do victims, survivors, and their families need compensation for, and what forms of compensation would they potentially receive if the bill was passed?

**ET:** Yea, victim compensation funds are used to reimburse survivors of costs associated with all harms. So, hospital bills, burial expenses, temporary housing, or lock replacement. Really, anything that would help survivors regain stability in the aftermath of violence.

**CA:** Why should people be activists, especially students? What is the importance of activism throughout everyone's life?

**ET:** So for me, one of the voices that really isn't heard a lot are students. I think students have so much to say but are often looked down upon because of their age and everything else that's going around with them. I think politically, politics has made students look a little bit deranged. Like really. Like they don't know what they're doing, they have no say at the big kid's table or adult's table as they would say. You know, students come from all different walks of life, you know. What we're really taught through entertainment is that college students are from 18-22 but I had classmates that are well in their 30s and have families. I have a classmate that is 48- twice the age that I am, could be my father, really. And they have been through so much and they have so much to say but because they are students, they're looked down upon- no one wants to hear them. So, by banding together and creating community with the students and if you guys know how to use that voice and know the keywords to say and know what you're fighting for, someone is going to listen.

**CA:** Finally, what can people, especially students, do to help their community and those who are victims or survivors of violence?

**ET:** Students can do anything! I think what I really learned from Common Justice and my mentor is the power of knowing who your elected officials are. I know it's very cliché but it is very important. These are the people that are fighting for you. Their mission is to protect us and serve us so new. Knowing who your elected officials are in your district and getting into contact with them, and seeing what kind of bills that they support, and what they don't support is really important. Never holding back really. I think that you know, students work hard. Some of us have full-time jobs, part-time jobs, have all these internships and have their own personal family lives. So whenever you get a chance to be in that space where you're asked to say something like, say something because someone is definitely listening. And we all have these really great ideas that shouldn't be shut down. It builds something with you.

**CA:** Thank you, Emma, for your time and for sharing your experience with Common Justice while being a student. It's truly been a pleasure.