

What Happens When You Are A Witness to a Crime

If you saw a crime happen, you have an opportunity and responsibility to help your community by co-operating with the police and the prosecutors. Here's what to expect:

During and Immediately After You Witness a Crime:

Police on the scene will often collect information from individuals to quickly assess the situation and try to arrest the offender as soon as possible. Please **tell the police everything you have seen** and heard, including any **description of the offender** and **give your contact information** to the police.

The police may tell you that they have someone detained that they would like you to look at. The police will then drive you to the location of the detainee to see if you can make a positive identification. In cases where a suspect is arrested sometime after the crime, perhaps several hours or days later, you may be shown a set of photographs to see if you recognize who was involved in the crime. Please be aware that the person being detained or being shown to you may or may not be the guilty party. **A good identification includes facial and body features and distinctive clothing.**

Generally, you will be contacted by the detectives or police if you have given a statement of any kind to the police. However, many cases are being investigated at one time. If you have not been contacted within a couple of days, or if you have information about a crime and have not been contacted at all, please immediately call our Community Area Policing (CAPS) team, and give them your information so they can connect you to the detectives. In addition, police will often not know that you have video. If you have video that relates to a crime, please send it to the CAPS office as well. Please call or send information to:

18th District (Crimes that occur South of Fullerton).
Phone: 312-742-5778 - Sgt. Chris Schenk or Officer Al Robinson
CAPS018District@chicagopolice.org

19th District (Crimes that occur North of Fullerton).
Phone: 312-744-8320 - Officer Kellee Simz or Officer Anastasia Patterson
CAPS019District@chicagopolice.org

Please call their number and leave a message. They will call you back. Again, this may take some time, because police work on shifts, and have many matters pending. If you feel that police are not being responsive, please contact our office at yourvoice@ward43.org.

Confidentiality of Witness Information

Illinois law prohibits the sharing of your personal information with the defendant in almost all circumstances, and requires a court order in the limited circumstances that would allow it (this is very rarely done). There is a special law in Illinois designed to protect victims and witnesses to a crime. If you have concerns about being a witness, you can call the Cook County State's Attorney's Victim and Witness Assistance Unit at 773-674-7200.

No Immediate Arrest

If there has been no arrest, the detectives will continue to gather information until they have enough to bring charges. The case may continue to be investigated which could take months, and in some cases, years. Do not expect to be contacted unless the investigators need further information from you or when charges are brought.

If the Case Proceeds in Court

Once charges are brought, the Cook County State's Attorney or police working with them will contact you as necessary.

Witnesses do not usually have to appear in felony court unless there is an actual hearing that requires witness testimony. Most cases result in a plea of guilty before trial. In that case, you will never have to testify.

In misdemeanor cases, you will be more likely to have to go to court, because those cases are often heard on the first or second court dates. Misdemeanor charges are often dropped simply because the witnesses do not appear in court, so please attend when asked.

During proceedings in a criminal case, there is a process known as discovery in which witness statements are provided to lawyers for the defense. However, as already stated, the Illinois Supreme Court Rules hold that defendants **shall not be given any contact or any other personal information for the witnesses**. This ensures the confidentiality of your information. Defense attorneys are required by law and the code of ethics to not share this information. You may be contacted by a defense attorney to be interviewed, but you are not required in any way to do so.

If you are contacted by anybody other than the police or a lawyer about what you saw or know, you should immediately notify the police and the State's Attorney's Office. In emergency situations, always contact 911 first.

Court Advocacy:

Court Advocates are volunteers in our community that attend court hearings to monitor cases and to represent the community and show support for victims and witnesses. If you are a victim or witness in a case, and want someone to accompany you to court, please contact our office at yourvoice@ward43.org or 773-348-9500. The Alderman or a court advocate will go with you. Even though a criminal case can take months or even years to go through the legal process, your involvement ensures that the case is prosecuted.

Under Illinois law, you have certain rights as a witness. These include:

- Help with your employer to minimize loss of pay and benefits.
- Secure waiting area at court, away from the accused person.
- You have the right to have your role as a witness and the court process explained to you, including information about when you need to attend court and what you can expect when you are there.