



Fact Sheet

Witness Security

2026

- ▶ The U.S. Marshals Service operates the federal Witness Security Program, sometimes referred to as the “Witness Protection Program.”
- ▶ Witnesses protected by the Witness Security Program generally testify against major criminal organizations and their members, such as traditional organized crime groups, gangs and terrorist organizations.
- ▶ The Witness Security Program provides for the security, safety and health of government witnesses and their authorized family members, whose lives are in danger as a result of their cooperation with the U.S. government.
- ▶ The U.S. Marshals Service provides 24-hour protection to all witnesses while they are in a high-threat environment, including trials and other court appearances.
- ▶ Witnesses and their families typically get new identities with documentation.
- ▶ Witnesses may initially receive financial assistance for housing, subsistence for basic living expenses and medical care. Job training and employment assistance may also be provided, in order to assist the witness with becoming self-sufficient.
- ▶ The Witness Security Program has successfully protected approximately 19,300 participants – including innocent victim-witnesses and cooperating defendants and their dependent family members – from intimidation and retribution since the program began in 1971.
- ▶ To determine who is admitted into the program, all potential witnesses undergo intensive vetting by the following: the sponsoring law enforcement agency, the U.S. Attorney sponsoring the potential witnesses, the U.S. Marshals Service, and the Department of Justice’s Office of Enforcement Operations, which makes the final determination.
- ▶ No Witness Security Program participant following program guidelines has ever been harmed or killed.
- ▶ The Witness Security Program is a vital and effective tool in the U.S. government’s battle against organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and other major criminal enterprises.
- ▶ U.S. Marshals Service Witness Security personnel are the leading authorities and foremost experts on witness security matters, providing guidance and training to many government officials throughout the world.
- ▶ The Witness Security Program was authorized by the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970 and amended by the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984.