



WITNESS SUPPORT – THE FINNISH EXPERIENCE

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VS FINLAND'S SERVICES

- Help line (nation wide) Mon - Tue at 1-9 pm
Wed to Fri at 5-9 pm
- Lawyer's advice line Mon - Thu at 5-7 pm
- Internet help through www.rikunet.fi
- SMS messaging through mobile phone 24/7
- Support persons
- Witness support
- Advice for victims of discrimination

WITNESS SUPPORT IN FINLAND

- Only a small part of all services
- We have no special funding for the witness support
- There is no funding expected in the near future either
- The court can invite also a plaintiff to the court to be heard in witnessing purpose
- A letter sent to witnesses:

Enclosed to the invitation from almost all
District Courts and Courts of Appeal

WITNESS SUPPORT IN FINLAND

- Witness support started as a pilot in 2004 in Turku
- In Rovaniemi it started 2005 in District Court and 2008 also in Court of Appeal
- Nowadays we have witness support in courts in two cities, in Rovaniemi and in Vaasa
- Service is available in District Court and in Court of Appeal
- The service is given in cooperation with the local University Faculty of Law
- Witness support is not the same as witness protection

THE COURSE

- The course is optional for law students
- Lectures are given on four days, totally 17 hours
- Contents
 - Victim Support Finland and Witness support
 - Witness's procedural status
 - Witness psychology
 - Witness support in practice

Lecturers: Victim support employee and Doctor of Law from the University

THE COURSE; EXECUTION

- Students take part in two trial sessions
- They participate in witness support service as agreed in the District Court and in the Court of Appeal (3-4 months period)
- They pay attention to needs of each witness they meet in the courts
- They keep a written diary on their learning process (evaluation and experiences)
- Supervision 3 x 1.5 hours

PURPOSE OF WITNESS SUPPORT

- Increase citizens willingness and courage to testify
- Modify citizens attitude more positive towards witnessing
- Provide confidential support to witnesses
- To discuss witnesses feelings and thoughts about what has happened
- To discuss the on-coming trial
- We don't intervene to the content of the testimony!
- We serve both victims and the defendants witnesses

GOALS

- To help the witness to give testimony more calmly and truthfully
- Provide witnesses guidance and advice on their rights
- Advise where to get additional help
- Support witnesses to cope with their experiences as well as possible

FUNCTION

- Guidance and advice
- Information on juridical proceedings
- Information on practical conditions (schedules, premises)
- Information on witnesses compensations
- Information on expectations for witnesses

THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS OF WITNESSES

- Do I have to testify in court?
- What will happen at the trial, and who will say what?
- Who will be there?
- What do I need to do there?
- Questions about compensations for witnesses
- Questions regarding the invitation letter
- People are afraid to witness. How can I protect myself?

EU DIRECTIVE

- It does not mention the witnesses at all
- Therefore, the state is not willing to pay the Victim Support Finland to organize nationwide witness support services
- This would be a challenge to the VSE: to use influence to get funding to the witness support all over the Europe

- Thank you!

Tiina Rantanen

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