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John Madigan 12/23/15



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS

Lisa Madigan
ATTORNEY GENERAL

December 23, 2015

RE: Annual Report of the Violent Crimes Advisory Commission

Dear Honorable Members of the Illinois Legislature:

As Chairperson of the Violent Crimes Advisory Commission, I am pleased to provide this annual report in accordance with the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act (VCVA). [725 ILCS 240/5].

The Office of the Illinois Attorney General administers the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Program [725 ILCS 240], awarding grants to government and non-profit social service agencies throughout the state that provide services to victims and witnesses of violent crime. These services meet the statutory mandate by assisting criminal justice agencies in enforcing the constitutional rights of crime victims and giving more personal attention to victims and witnesses, sensitizing those working with crime victims, attempting to decrease the incidence of unreported crimes, assuring victims are informed of the progress of their cases, and encouraging public use of services. [725 ILCS 240/2]. Services include, among other things, assistance in obtaining orders of protection, civil no contact and stalking no contact orders, safe shelter, notifications related to criminal proceedings, accompaniment to court proceedings, counseling, assistance obtaining crime victim compensation and referrals to social service agencies.

Overview of the VCVA Grant Program

In 1983, the Illinois General Assembly recognized the importance of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice process and passed the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act. In doing so, the General Assembly found that "the single most important determinant of whether a case is resolved is the information and assistance provided to the victim or witness." [725 ILCS 240/2]. Intending "to provide ways of improving attitudes of victims and witnesses toward the criminal justice system and to provide for faster and more complete victim recovery from the effects of crime," the law established a grant program to provide services to victims and witnesses of violent crime. Fines assessed against defendants convicted of various criminal offenses fund the program.

In 1985, the first year of the program, the Office of the Attorney General awarded 75 grants totaling \$586,170.21. This fiscal year, the Office of the Attorney General awarded 250 VCVA

grants totaling \$5,952,215.00. This represents a three-year trend of increased funds available for eligible agencies.

Eligibility for the VCVA Grant Program

Any government or non-profit agency in the state that offers one or more of the following services for victims of violent crime may apply for VCA grant funding:

coordinate volunteers to work with criminal justice agencies to provide direct victim services or to establish community support;

provide assistance to victims of violent crime and their families in obtaining assistance through other official or community resources;

provide elderly victims of crime with services appropriate to their special needs;

provide transportation and/or household assistance to those victims participating in the criminal justice process;

provide victims of domestic and sexual violence and sexual harassment with services appropriate to their special needs;

provide courthouse reception and guidance, including explanation of unfamiliar procedures and bilingual information;

provide in-person or telephone hot-line assistance to victims;

provide special counseling facilities and rehabilitation services to victims;

provide other services as the Commission shall deem appropriate to further the purposes of this Act;

provide public education on crime and crime victims;

provide training and sensitization for persons who work with victims of crime;

provide special counseling facilities and rehabilitation services for child victims of sex offenses;

when applicable, centers shall enter into written networking agreements to provide for the special needs of child victims of violent crimes;

provide assistance in exercising rights provided in the Roadside Memorial Act for the families of victims of fatal injury crashes on roadways.

[725 ILCS 240/8]

The selection of agencies to receive funding includes consideration of the following factors:

1. stated goals and services in the application
2. commitment and ability to provide the stated services
3. number of people to be served and the needs of the community
4. evidence of community support
5. organizational structure of the agency
6. maximization of volunteers where appropriate.

[725 ILCS 240/7]

In accordance with the law, the Office of Illinois Attorney General promulgated rules to implement the grant program. [89 Il.Admin.Code 1100]

The Grant Award Process

Grant awards are made each fiscal year, and completed applications are always due on the first Friday in February for the upcoming fiscal year. The VCVA staff in the Attorney General's Office review the applications and present recommendations to the Attorney General. After the Attorney General makes final decisions, the staff executes grant agreements reflecting the conditions of the award. Agencies are required to submit fiscal and programmatic reports to the VCVA Program on a quarterly basis. Grant Monitors review quarterly reports, conduct site visits, and ensure that victims are receiving the services outlined in the agreement. VCVA staff also provide technical and program development assistance when appropriate to new or existing programs throughout the state.

FY16 VCVA Grant-funded Programs

VCVA funds provide valuable support to the entire spectrum of victim services agencies represented in the State. From domestic violence services, homicide survivor groups, rape crisis centers, children advocacy centers, and other community-based organizations, VCVA funds increase the ability of all funded agencies to serve more victims with compassionate, high quality services. Funds are also available to state-wide coalitions to assist their member agencies in building capacity and implementing best practices to serve victims. In FY16, agencies in 78 Illinois counties directly receive VCVA funds. Some of these agencies serve as regional centers and provide service through a number of adjacent counties. The 250 VCVA grants represent the following program categories:

- 1 bias violence
- 27 children's advocacy centers
- 22 court appointed special advocates
- 4 child victimization
- 4 community based

- 58 domestic violence
- 2 domestic violence and sexual assault
- 2 driving under the influence
- 1 homicide survivor
- 13 legal service
- 3 police based
- 71 prosecutor based
- 27 sexual assault
- 10 senior victims
- 4 training and technical services
- 1 therapy

A complete list of the programs, by county, can be found on the Attorney General's website at: <http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/victims/vcva.html>.

Fiscal Status

As noted earlier, fines assessed against defendants convicted of various criminal offenses and selected traffic violations are the source of funds for VCVA grants and programs. Fines are fixed amounts determined by the level of the offense -- felony convictions (\$100.00), misdemeanor convictions (\$75.00) and selected traffic violations (\$50.00).

The grantees are facing a unique challenge this fiscal year. The funding for the VCVA grant program has yet to be appropriated, so no funds have been distributed since July 2015. Many of the agencies that receive VCVA grants are small, underfunded agencies. They struggle to get through each year in good times. When times get tough, they suffer mightily. A number of agencies are closing, laying off staff, cutting hours, and cutting services. Diminishing the quantity and consistency of available services adversely affects victims of violent crime, including children and the elderly.

How Can Legislators Help?

Members of the General Assembly can help victims of violent crime in their districts by:

- ✓ Appropriating \$6,000,000.00 from the VCVA fund as soon as possible.
- ✓ Making sure agencies providing victims services in your district know about the VCVA program.
- ✓ Referring victim service providers to the Attorney General's Crime Victim Service Division for more information. Call toll-free – 800.228.3368 – or check the website, <http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/victims/index.html> .

- ✓ Working with the State's Attorneys, judges and county Court Clerks in your district to ensure fees are being imposed and that they are collected on a regular basis and deposited into the VCVA fund.
- ✓ Participating in coordinated community responses to specific types of violence and to violence prevention efforts.

The Violent Crimes Advisory Commission looks forward to working with the Attorney General and the General Assembly in the coming year to continue to ensure high quality, consistent services for victims across Illinois. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions – 312.814.1427, or chora@atg.state.il.us.

All my best,



Cynthia M. Hora
Chief, Crime Victim Services Division
Chair, Violent Crimes Advisory Commission