November 16, 2021

RE: Annual Report of the Violent Crimes Advisory Commission

Dear Honorable Members of the Illinois General Assembly:

As Chairperson of the Violent Crimes Advisory Commission, I am pleased to provide this annual report in accordance with the Violent Crimes Victims Assistance Act (VCVA Act). [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 giving 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 their rights as victims of crime, 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, referrals to social service agencies, and the assertion and enforcement of crime victims’ constitutional and statutory rights.

**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. For Fiscal Year 22, the current fiscal year, the Office of the Attorney General awarded 246 VCVA grants totaling $7,468,330.00. The average award amount is approximately $30,359.00.

**Eligibility for the VCVA Grant Program**

Any public or private 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; and

6. maximization of volunteers where appropriate. [725 ILCS 240/7].

**The Grant Award Process**

Grant awards are made each fiscal year, and completed applications are 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 performance and expenditure 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.

The Fiscal Year 22 grant review process occurred in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Along with the entire Office of the Attorney General, VCVA staff adopted its process to ensure the health and safety of the team during the pandemic. VCVA utilized technology, such as video conferencing, and the new electronic grant management system (EGMS), to ensure that all necessary review meetings could take place in a safe manner, all the while ensuring that the VCVA grant process proceeded on schedule.

The EGMS was launched immediately prior to the release of the FY22 application. The VCVA staff provided many hours of support to our applicants in navigating this new system. All VCVA processes are now stored “in the cloud” and accessible to the Grant Monitors from any electronic device. This allows an efficient work flow, streamlined on line filing of applications, reports, and other grant documents, and virtually eliminates our use of paper files. The EGMS is a secure portal and moves the grant life cycle into the 21st century.

**Fiscal Year 22 VCVA Grant-Funded Programs**

VCVA grant funds provide valuable support to the entire spectrum of victim services agencies represented in the State. Funds awarded to agencies are used for a variety of different services, such as domestic violence services, homicide survivor groups, rape crisis centers, children advocacy centers, other community-based organizations, and State’s Attorney Offices. VCVA funds increase the ability of all funded agencies to serve more victims with compassionate, high quality services. Funds are also available to statewide coalitions to assist their member agencies in building capacity and implementing best practices to serve victims.

Before the start of the FY 22 grant cycle, VCVA staff engaged in outreach to encourage new organizations to apply for VCVA grants. This included community violence and violence prevention programs who do important work in underserved, high crime target neighborhoods. The 10 new organizations funded in FY21 received continued funding; in addition to 4 new agencies.

This year, VCVA staff also provided training and instructions on the grant application process, in order for our grantee’s to navigate the new EGMS.

In FY22, agencies in 80 Illinois counties directly receive VCVA funds. Some of these agencies serve as regional centers and provide service through a number of adjacent counties. The 246 VCVA grants represent the following program categories:

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| --- | --- |
| **Program Type** | **Number of Awards** |
| Children’s Advocacy Centers | 25 |
| Court Appointed Special Advocates | 22 |
| Child Victimization | 3 |
| Community Violence | 7 |
| Domestic Violence | 54 |
| Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault | 5 |
| DUI Victim Services | 2 |
| Elder Abuse | 9 |
| Homicide Survivor Services | 3 |
| Legal Services | 9 |
| Police Based | 3 |
| Prosecution Based | 72 |
| Sexual Assault | 25 |
| Technical and Training | 4 |
| Violence Prevention | 3 |
| **Total** | 246 |

Prosecution Based and Police Based programs fund Victim/Witness Coordinators in State’s Attorney’s Offices and Sheriff’s Offices to ensure the rights of crime victims, help people understand the court process, provide notifications about court dates, assist with Crime Victims Compensation, and make referrals for appropriate victim services. Legal Services fund non-profit legal service agencies to assist victims of domestic violence and sexual assault with orders of protections, legal representation, and legal services for victims of human trafficking.

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**

The operating costs for the VCVA Bureau are primarily appropriated from the Violent Crimes Victims Assistance (VCVA) Fund. The Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act imposes a fine on persons convicted of criminal offenses and certain offenses listed in the Illinois Vehicle Code. These fines are deposited in the VCVA Fund for the benefit of victim service programs administered by the Office of the Illinois Attorney General. [725 ILCS 240/1 et. seq.]

Public Act 100-0987, effective July 1, 2019, made changes to the funding mechanism for the VCVA Fund. This law restructured the fines, fees, and costs assessed in criminal cases in Illinois, including the amounts deposited in the VCVA Fund. We continue to monitor the impact of Public Act 100-0987 on the VCVA Fund, including any additional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the VCVA funding stream. Please see Exhibit A on the history of deposits in the VCVA funds. As was the case for FY 21, the Office has shifted operating costs of the VCVA Fund to other special funds for FY 22. The VCVA fund provides $5.5 million in grants. Other special funds that the Office maintains absorbed all other costs. It is important to sustain sufficient funding to support VCVA objectives in order to preserve the continuity of its important service for victims and witnesses of violent crime.

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 at 312.814.1427, or by email at sharisse.kimbro@ilag.gov.

Sincerely,

Sharisse Kimbro

Chief, Crime Victim Services Division

Chairperson, Violent Crimes Advisory Commission