

December 18, 2007

Dear Honorable Members of the Illinois Legislature:

Since 1985, the Office of the Illinois Attorney General has administered the “Violent Crime Victims Assistance Act” (VCVA) (725 ILCS 240). To provide for faster and more complete victim recovery from the effects of crime, VCVA provides grant funding for victim and witness services and victim advocacy. As mandated by statute, the Attorney General’s office: assists criminal justice agencies in giving more personal attention to victims and witnesses; sensitizes those working with crime victims; attempts to decrease the incidence of unreported crimes; assures victims are informed of the progress of their cases; and encourages public use of services. (725 ILCS 240/2).

From 75 VCVA grants totaling \$586,170.21 in 1985, the program has grown to awarding 379 grants totaling \$7,746,704.00 in Fiscal Year 2007. The Violent Crime Advisory Commission created by the VCVA Act is honored to provide the General Assembly with an overview of the program and information about currently funded programming across the state. I have enclosed a current list of Advisory Commission members.

VCVA Program Overview

In 1984, the General Assembly found “that when crime strikes, the chief concern of criminal justice agencies has been apprehending and dealing with the criminal, and that the victim or witness is frequently forgotten or further victimized by the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, the single most important determinant of whether a case is resolved is the information and assistance provided by the victim or witness.” (725 ILCS 240/2). In response to these findings, the General Assembly enacted the VCVA Act to help change attitudes towards victims and enhance efforts to assist victims in any way possible.

VCVA is funded by fees assessed against persons convicted in Illinois of violent crimes, other felonies and misdemeanors, and certain traffic offenses in Illinois. This funding mechanism has been effective in ensuring that victims have the services needed to recover and rebuild their lives. Appropriately, offenders pay to make sure these services are funded to assist all victims. Funds collected are forwarded by the county court clerks to the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Fund in the State Treasury.

VCVA Program Eligibility

Any government or non-profit agency in the state can apply for VCVA funding pursuant to the Act if they offer one or more of the following services:

- 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 Violent Crime Advisory 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; and,
- Provide special counseling facilities and rehabilitation services for child victims of sex offenses. (725 ILCS 240/8).

By law, the selection of agencies to receive funding includes consideration of the following factors:

1. Stated goals of applicants.
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)

The VCVA Process

Each year, the Attorney General's office makes available applications for funding through the VCVA Program. Completed applications are due in February. The VCVA staff members process and review the applications and present recommendations to the Attorney General. Once final decisions are made by the Attorney General, grant agreements are drafted and signed to reflect the conditions of the award. Agencies are required to timely submit reports every quarter. A VCVA Grant Monitor is assigned to each agency to review the agency's Quarterly Reports, conduct site visits, and ensure that victims are receiving the services outlined in the agreement. VCVA staff members also provide technical assistance and program development help to new or expanding agencies throughout the state.

FY07 VCVA Grant-funded Programs

Although VCVA funds are not the sole source of funding for any agency, funding from this program often makes it possible for services to exist and to provide assistance to thousands of victims who otherwise would have gone without help. Currently, agencies in 83 counties receive grants from the Violent Crime Victims Assistance Program. The remaining counties are served by one or more of the funded programs.

Attorney General Madigan has prioritized grants that support staff members who provide direct services to victims. These service providers are vital to the continued support necessary to help victims navigate the criminal justice system and cope with the changes in their lives. Grant awards range in amount from \$1,475 to \$40,000.

VCVA funds are not restricted to any one type of organization. From rape crisis centers to prosecutors' offices to hospitals to other community based organizations, VCVA funds are awarded to any agency within a community that has taken on the challenges of providing helpful services to victims of crime. A small number of grants are also awarded to statewide coalitions working to build the capacity of their member organizations to effectively and compassionately assist victims throughout the state.

The 379 VCVA grants provided in FY07 break down into the following program types:

- 99 family violence.
- 80 prosecutor-based victim witness.
- 81 child victimization.
- 36 sexual assault.
- 26 community-based victim assistance.
- 26 policed-based victim assistance.
- 20 senior victims.
- 74 training and technical assistance.
- 2 driving under the influence victims.
- 2 bias violence.

Please see the enclosed exhibits providing a list of FY07 VCVA grants by county and program type and a map of the state as a quick reference to the number of grants by county.

How Can Legislators Help?

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

- Making sure agencies providing victim services in your district know about the VCVA Program.
- Providing information about the VCVA Program in your district office. Please see the attachment outlining VCVA Eligibility Guidelines.
- 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, www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/victims/index.html.
- Working with the county court clerks in your district to ensure fees are being collected on a regular basis and deposited into the VCVA fund. Contact Elizabeth Scholz for more information about collections in your area—217/223-2221.
- Participating in coordinated community responses to specific types of violence and to violence prevention efforts.

The Violent Crime 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, chora@atg.state.il.us.

All my best,



Cynthia M. Hora
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Chair, Violent Crime Advisory Commission