

MINUTES
Connecticut Advisory Council for Victims of Crime
November 10, 2020

The Connecticut Advisory Council for Victims of Crime met via Microsoft Teams.

Members in Attendance: Co-Chair, Susan Omilian, Melissa Conway, Melissa Farley, Bob Garguilo, Mikayla Green, Beth Hamilton, Irene Mikol, Jessica Pizzano, Ebonie Suggs, Sharmese Walcott, Gerrie Wild, Deborah Witkin, Andrew Woods, Yvette Young

OVS Staff in Attendance:

Koren Butler-Kurth, Valina Carpenter, Linda J. Cimino, James Morgan, Jean M. Weisbrod

Agenda:

1. Welcome
Susan Omilian opened the meeting at 2:05 p.m. Council members introduced themselves.
2. Approval of the September 15, 2020 meeting minutes:
Susan asked for a motion to accept the September meeting minutes. The motion was moved and seconded; the minutes were accepted as presented.
3. OVS Report
 - a) The OVS *Victim Compensation Program Budget statement for month ending 10/31/20 FY 07/01/20 - 06/30/21, Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund Contribution (CICF) Summary of Court Collections 07/01/20 - 09/30/20, and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund Contributions FY 20 - 21 Monthly Summary*, were distributed to Council Members via email prior to the meeting.

James Morgan reviewed the *OVS Victim Compensation Program Budget Statement for month ending 10/31/20 FY 07/01/20 - 06/30/21*. Jim reported total disbursements through 10/31/20 are \$740,000 which is \$165,000 below total disbursements through 10/31/19. Jim stated expenditures were lower in the summer months due to reduced staffing in the office, however, the office is open fully and payment processing has been increasing from month to month. Jim reported that federal VOCA compensation grants are being used to supplement state funding to offset declines in revenues into the CICF. Jim stated that there is sufficient state and federal funding to make compensation benefit payments during this fiscal year.

Jim reviewed the *Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund Contribution (CICF) Summary of Court Collections 07/01/20 - 09/30/20*. Jim reported court contributions through 09/30/20 are \$185,294 which is \$215,000 below total collections through 09/30/19. Jim stated that the amount of collections

received in a 3 month period were typically received in a 1 month period. Jim reported that the majority of collections are through the Centralized Infractions Bureau E-Pay system for cases that are disposed of online. Jim stated in FY 19 - 20, collections started to decline in March 2020, as the courts began to close. Collections for FY 19 - 20 were 16% lower than the year before. Collections in the courts are slowly starting to re-occur as the courts reopen for business.

Jim provided updates on Federal VOCA Funding:

- Efforts are being made at the national level to increase deposits into the federal Crime Victims Fund which is the source of funding for each state's VOCA Victim Assistance and Victim Compensation grants.
- Due to declining revenues, the fund balance in the fund has declined from over \$11 billion to \$5.5 billion.
- Increases in revenue are needed to maintain the operations of the fund.
- National coalitions are asking Congress to change the method of deposits into the fund by allowing for financial penalties from deferred prosecution and non-prosecution agreements to be deposited into the fund instead of into the federal general funds. This would be consistent with the treatment of penalties from criminal convictions.
- OVS has sufficient VOCA funding to maintain our current contracts for FY 20-21 and FY 21-22. In the fall of 2021, we will be going out to bid for services starting July 1, 2022. It is unknown at this time how much funding will be available.

b) OVS Update Report not provided

4. Update on how COVID-19 has impacted victim service delivery

Jessica Pizzano (Survivors of Homicide) reported:

- No activity in courts for homicide cases at the moment
- Victims' families are feeling isolated
- Zoom is utilized to meet with prosecutors and victims' families
- There has been an increase in the number of homicide cases
- Fundraising has been negatively impacted
- On-line victim support group attendance has increased

Gerrie Wild (Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence) reported:

- CCADV released a report regarding the Dominant Aggressor law and the finding, which were very positive. Statistics indicate a 10-16% decrease in dual arrests since early 2019
- The Dominant Aggressor Report and a Brief regarding restraining orders are available on the CCADV website
- The Safe Connect advocates are assisting victims filing electronic Temporary Restraining Orders

- Challenges related to victims receiving information and updates from the courts but CCADV has collaborated with Court Support Services Division to resolve the issues
- Concerns about the new domestic violence dockets being created while victims and advocates are not receiving advance notice of hearings

Andrew Woods (Hartford Communities That Care) reported:

- Challenges regarding telecommunication
- Addressing basic needs, such as personal safety, to victims of violent crimes
- The number of violent crimes in Hartford during September 2020 was the highest in 2 decades
- Increased seasonal and permanent staff to provide additional resources

Beth Hamilton (Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence) reported:

- Support groups and individualized crisis counseling are provided to victims and survivors with remote services
- Challenges relating to working with victims' and survivors of sexual assault regarding hospital and police department accompaniments. Victims and survivors are opting out of remote services
- The significant increase in the amount of physical violence in sexual assault cases
- CT Victims Rights Center success using Microsoft Teams to attend court hearings with victims but the judicial process is slow
- An increase in the number of childhood sexual violence cases now that children are back in contact with caretakers and family members
- An increase in the number of on-line child victimization
- Challenges faced by the post-conviction Victim Services Unit now that it is operating remotely versus being located in courthouses or probation offices
- Issues related to sex offenders receiving treatment
- Challenges relating to assisting victims with meeting basic needs
- General lack of internet access among victims and survivors

Ebonie Suggs (Department of Correction Victim Services Unit) reported:

- The increase in the number of offenders and inmates that are receiving a Promise to Appear and are bonding out faster than normal
- Issues related to monitoring inmates on an early release or community supervised release programs

Yvette Young (Human Anti-Trafficking Response Team) reported on:

- Issues related to an increase in on-line solicitation
- The Human Anti-Trafficking Response Team in partnership with the Connecticut Children's Alliance recently provided trainings regarding internet safety to parents and students because there is a critical need
- Isolation practices has provided offenders greater opportunities

Melissa Farley (Judicial Branch External Affairs) reported:

- The number of criminal cases that were resolved or moved forward through remote means has increased
- Offered assistance to Council Members to address issues that they encounter within their victim service agencies

Melissa Conway (Office of Policy and Management) reported:

- Supporting sub-recipients to be as flexible as possible to meet the different needs that arise
- Would like to learn more about innovative use of technology for service providers and what service providers are doing to support mental health of their staff
- Announced a pilot project by the Hispanic Health Council to address human and sex trafficking which is looking for connections in the Hartford area

Linda Cimino (Office of Victim Services) reported:

- Training and Outreach Unit sponsored trainings were suspended temporarily but now has virtual training sessions scheduled
- Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) Program cancelled the spring training session
- SAFE Program completed a virtual training session in the Fall but the Clinical portion of the training was postponed until 2021
- The number of applications submitted to the Victim Compensation Unit has significantly increased after a 3 month decrease
- As of November 9, 2020, there were 1,070 applications entered in the database

Koren Butler-Kurth (Office of Victim Services) reported:

- Court proceedings look very different, even from court to court, and multiple virtual platforms are being used
- Victims have been asked to limit the number of people in the courtroom
- In non-domestic protective order cases, if an offender makes bond before the arraignment it may be months for a hearing date and no opportunity to have the order of protection in place
- Due to courthouse closures and the reassignment of court business, issues arose related to CT SAVIN notifications providing closed court information
- Issues related to COVID compliant workspaces and locations to meet with victims
- Challenges to access equipment and technology
- Positives include victims can have remote access to proceedings with less time lost from work and eliminates the need to solve transportation or day care issues

- Post-conviction process is done remotely which makes it more convenient for victims who have since moved out of state and eliminates the need to travel to take part in the hearing

5. New Business

February 9, 2021, meeting topics:

- Legislative update: Opportunity for Council members to share their initiatives and issues for 2021 legislative session
- Federal and VOCA updates
- Continued roundtable discussion about the impact of COVID

6. Adjournment

Susan adjourned the meeting at 3:40 p.m.

Jean M. Weisbrod, Recorder