

MINUTES
Connecticut Advisory Council for Victims of Crime
September 16, 2008

The Connecticut Advisory Council for Victims of Crime met at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, in the fourth floor conference room on Tuesday, September 16, 2008, from 2:11 p.m. to 3:51 p.m.

Members in Attendance:

Co-chair Steve Eppler-Epstein, Joseph Bibisi, Larry Bostrom, Chester Brodnicki, Cheryl Burack, Janice Heggie Margolis, Nancy Kushins, and Jan VanTassel

Members Excused or Absent:

Deputy Chief Court Administrator the Honorable Patrick L. Carroll, III, Fernando Betancourt, John Duffey, Kevin Lawlor, Agnes Maldonado, Jo-Ann Miller, and Neil O'Leary

OVS Staff Present:

Linda J. Cimino, James Morgan, Tina Bouchard, Joanna Buikus, Valina Carpenter, Brenda Jordan, and Rachel McKnight

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Steve Eppler-Epstein welcomed members and called the meeting to order at 2:11 p.m.

2. Review and Approval of the July 15, 2008 Meeting Minutes

Steve asked for a motion to accept the minutes of July 15, 2008. The motion was moved and seconded, and the minutes were accepted as presented.

3. Update – Compensation Program Issues

Jim Morgan distributed a report entitled *Criminal Injuries Compensation Program Budget statement for month ending August 31, 2008, FY 07/01/08 – 06/30/09*. Jim stated that thirty-nine percent of the available appropriation (\$1.1 million) for this fiscal year is committed for last fiscal year activity with approximately \$400,000 spent as of August; fifty-one percent of this fiscal year budget is expended and committed.

Larry Bostrom stated that at the last Advisory Council meeting, members were interested in receiving input from victims who had benefited from the Compensation Program and as a result Larry sought comments from Survivors of Homicide members. The main concern of the respondents was the \$5,000 cap on funeral expense reimbursement as total funeral costs exceeds the compensation allowed. Larry remarked that the respondents stated they were pleased with the expedition of compensation claims and the courtesy of the Compensation staff, however, several funeral homes require payment prior to providing services. Larry requested an explanation of the emergency fund allowed in statute [Connecticut General Statutes § 54-217]. Linda responded that OVS has submitted a legislative proposal to remove or amend the language of the statute as it provides an unrealistic expectation to

claimants. The reality is that requests for emergency awards have to undergo processing with an approximate ten-day turnaround. The statute allows an emergency award to be made not to exceed \$2,000 and not in excess of the maximum allowed for personal injury (\$15,000) and survivor benefit (\$25,000) claims.

Linda remarked that under the leadership of the claims supervisors, the planning and budgeting of compensation funds by Jim Morgan, and the claims examiners prioritization skills, compensation claims have a quicker turn around time. Rachel McKnight added that claims examiners contact the funeral homes and explain the compensation process, which most times is successful in funeral homes becoming more patient in receiving funds.

Larry stated that respondents also commented:

- that the investment of compensation funds for minor dependents were beneficial
- that families of homicide victims in the Hartford area have not received information from the police department regarding the compensation program
- that some family members are not receiving victim notification
- on the difficulty in receiving mental health treatment in the Hartford, Waterbury, and Stamford areas

Linda thanked Council members for the discussions on the Compensation Program funding and stated that the next step OVS is initiating to address the issue, with the Council's approval, is two legislative proposals to increase funding.

Linda explained that monies recovered are not accessible [recovered funds are deposited into the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund (CICF)] and reduces the amount of the federal award. Jim added that the federal grant is reduced by sixty percent of the reimbursement recovered and provided the following example: if \$80,000 is recovered on compensation claims, the federal grant is offset by \$48,000.

Linda stated that the legislative proposal would allow access to the funds in the same fiscal year recovered. The second legislative proposal is to request a \$300,000 increase in the annual allocation. Members then discussed seeking a one-time allocation of \$1.1 million in addition to the increased allocation.

Steve stated that the question before the Council is whether to support OVS in requesting a one-time appropriation of \$1.1 million to eliminate deficit, and whether he is instructed to write a support letter on behalf of the Council.

Chet Brodnicki moved the motion and Larry seconded. Members then discussed the two OVS legislative proposals and agreed to amend the motion. The motion for the Advisory Council to support the two stated legislative proposals submitted by OVS and a one-time \$1.1 million allocation for the deficit was unanimously approved. Steve stated that he would consult with Linda on drafting a letter and the drafted letter would be provided to Advisory Council members.

4. OVS Update

Linda stated that the Deputy Chief Court Administrator Patrick L. Carroll and the Executive Director of Superior Court Operations Joseph D'Alesio would provide a presentation to the Advisory Council on the Judicial Branch strategic plan. Steve suggested that a half-hour is reserved at this meeting to discuss other business. Members agreed to table agenda item five, legislative initiatives, to the first half-hour of the November meeting.

Linda also reported on the following activities:

- Public Act 08-01 directs the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission to provide training to criminal justice personnel. Two cross-training conferences were held this year, one in July at Southern Connecticut State University and another on September 4 at the Convention Center. OVS provided workshops at both conferences.
- OVS, with the permission of Chief State's Attorney Kevin Kane, whose division is responsible for the Connecticut Commission on the Standardization of the Collection of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigations, will revise and print the informational booklet that is provided to sexual assault victims.
- OVS is negotiating a partnership with Infoline (211) to be listed as a resource on a human trafficking brochure that will be published by OVS and distributed by training staff from five agencies (The Barnaba Institute, Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, International Institute of Connecticut, The Connecticut Women's Consortium, and Women and Families Center). These agencies will receive funding from OVS to provide human trafficking training throughout the community.
- OVS formed a staff recognition committee to promote and develop employee recognition and to accomplish an activity in the OVS Strategic Work Plan. The Committee developed staff recognition awards that use a peer review process.
- Linda is serving on the Task Force on Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities at the invitation of Speaker of the House James Amman to look at the issue of domestic violence against immigrants. Chief Neil O'Leary also sits on the Task Force.

Chet remarked that he had read an article in the Hartford Courant regarding an influx of Karen immigrants and stated that he would provide information to Linda to bring to the Taskforce.

Joanna Buikus reported on the activities of the Letter Review Committee that was formed in 2006 to review compensation correspondence. To date, the Committee has reviewed thirty-two letters, which includes a frequently asked questions sheet on the claims process that Joanna made available to members. Among the letters the Committee is currently reviewing is a protective order letter mailed to victims informing of the expiration of the protective order. Joanna thanked Larry and Shirley Bostrom for their assistance in reviewing compensation letters from a victim's standpoint.

Rachel reported that she assists with the Review process [victim compensation claimants have a statutory right to have a determination issued by OVS to be reviewed by a victim compensation commissioner] and stated that the Governor appoints the Commissioners to a four-year term. Currently, there are four commissioners: Joseph Bibisi, who serves as chief victim compensation commissioner, Seth Feigenbaum, Louis Spadaccini, and Lisa MacDonald. OVS is working with the Governor's office to appoint an additional female commissioner.

Valina Carpenter reported on the Victim Services Unit activities:

- Several victims services advocate positions were filled in 2008: Karen Lucid located in Central Office; Effie Cotto in the Manchester court, Pamela O'Leary in the Stamford court; Wesley Chrostowski in the New Britain court, and Carmen Sierra, who transferred from the Meriden court, and Melissa Zavickas are located in the Boards of Pardons and Paroles' (BOPP) Central Office in Waterbury. The vacant position in the Meriden court has not been filled.
- Three victim services advocates: Jeanne Holm-Barth, David Pond, and Erin Spillane-Darcy will receive the annual Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Victim Assistance award on October 21, 2008.
- At the October 15, 2008, victim services advocate meeting, the Psychiatric Security Review Board will provide staff with the agency's current practices and procedures.
- A portion of the staff meetings entitled Peer Case Review provides VSAs with an opportunity to seek feedback from one another on difficult cases.

Tina Bouchard reported on the Education and Planning Unit activities:

- OVS is co-sponsoring a death notification workshop with MADD. The workshop will be held at the Four Points Sheraton in Meriden on September 23, 2008.
- The human trafficking brochure that OVS is developing will be translated in Russian, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Hindi, Haitian, Creole, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish. An English version of the brochure was circulated among members.
- The victims' rights booklet is scheduled to print in English and Spanish in the next few days. Copies of the booklet will be distributed at the November meeting.

Jim distributed the subcontractor list for fiscal year 08/09 and stated that a VOCA funding update on increasing the cap was not available. Jim also distributed and reviewed the OVS performance statistical data for fiscal year 07/08. Chet requested that future statistical reports include the previous fiscal year activities for comparative purposes.

Steve thanked OVS staff for the updates and for the quantity of work reflected in the statistical report.

Other:

Jan VanTassel inquired if a current OVS organizational chart is available. Linda

stated Brenda would e-mail the organizational chart to members. Chet inquired if there was any increase in the Homicide Outreach Program due to the increased homicides in Hartford and New Haven. Linda responded that she would speak with the person who maintains the program and a response would be e-mailed to members.

5. 2009 Legislative Initiatives

Members agreed to discuss this agenda item during the first half-hour of the November meeting.

6. New Business

Steve proposed a discussion on the compensation benefits for victims at the January meeting. Linda added OVS would like to bring for Council discussion at the January meeting a survey that will be distributed to victims for feedback on the services provided by victim services advocates and the activities planned for 2009 to commemorate OVS's thirty-year anniversary of providing services to crime victims.

7. Adjournment

Steve called for a motion to adjourn the meeting; the meeting adjourned at 3:51 p.m.

Brenda Jordan, Recorder