

City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 1, 2001

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: SUBMISSION OF GRANT APPLICATION TO THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES FOR THE CITY'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROJECT

ISSUE: City Council consideration of a grant application to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, STOP Violence Against Women Grant Program, in the amount of \$63,762 for the City's Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP).

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve the submission of the grant application to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services for funding in the amount of \$63,762 for continued funding of the City's Domestic Violence Intervention Project;
- (2) Approve the continuation of one full-time grant-funded Victim-Witness Specialist II position, and one part-time grant-funded Law Clerk position. The Office on Women and the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office will directly supervise these positions. These grant-funded positions would terminate upon the expiration of the grant. The individuals who are to fill these positions would be notified of this condition of employment at the time that they are hired, and would sign an agreement of understanding with regard to this condition. It should be noted that there are no funds available in the City budget to continue these activities once the grant funds are expired; and
- (3) Authorize the City Manager to execute all documents that may be required.

It should be noted that the grant application is due on September 14, 2001. Due to the constrained time line for grant submission, staff submitted the grant application contingent upon City Council approval at its September 11, 2001 meeting.

BACKGROUND: In 1985, the Alexandria City Council created the Victims of Violent Crime Task Force. With representatives from criminal justice, social services, and private agencies, the Task Force set out to improve coordination of and services to those victimized by violent crime in our community. The Task Force convened a series of work sessions and a public hearing to assess the adequacy of local services to victims of crime. Throughout these discussions, and in public testimony, domestic violence was raised repeatedly as a problem requiring an improved response. The Task Force concluded that improvements were needed in the way the City responded to domestic violence.

After an 18-month review of local, state and national trends, the City of Alexandria established mandatory arrest as the policy of its police department and launched the Domestic Violence Intervention Project in January 1988. Project members include representatives from the Office on Women, Victim Witness Assistance Program, Court Services Unit, Adult Probation and Parole, Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, Police Department, Office of Magistrate, Office of Sheriff, and Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Substance Abuse. The agencies work together to ensure that domestic violence is treated as a crime and to provide counseling services for abusers and victims.

Each Domestic Violence Intervention Project member agency provides a specific service to ensure that domestic violence cases are handled appropriately. The Police Department adheres to a "mandatory arrest policy" in cases where probable cause is found and written reports are mandatory on every domestic violence call regardless of arrest. The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office adheres to a "no-drop" policy in domestic violence cases placing a greater emphasis on prosecuting these cases. The Victim-Witness Assistance Program staff screen police reports daily and refers domestic violence cases to the Office on Women's Domestic Violence Program. Office on Women staff contact all victims to provide them with information regarding emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling services and the court process, and provide court accompaniment for all civil and criminal hearings. Defendants court-ordered into treatment are referred to the Alexandria Comprehensive Community Corrections Program, the Office of Adult Probation and Parole or the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Services Unit for assessment and monitoring.

DISCUSSION: In calendar year 1995, twenty-seven percent of all domestic violence cases (208 out of 761 cases) were not prosecuted because the victim did not cooperate with the prosecution. Such cases were nolle prossed for victim-related reasons, such as failure to appear in court, change in story or fear of retribution. These cases can be redocketed for the court if a new warrant is issued within one year of the date of the offense; however, during this time, the victim may continue to be in danger of violence from the abuser.

In 1997, the Domestic Violence Intervention Project was awarded grant funding from the Department of Criminal Justice Services to target these cases through "victimless prosecution." Funding was used to hire a full-time Victim Witness Specialist II and a part-time Law Clerk; develop and implement procedures to assist in prosecuting domestic violence cases where the

victim does not cooperate; provide follow-up services to these victims; and, encourage victims to participate in the future if the violence continues. In the first three years of this project, the number of cases dismissed due to a victim's reluctance to cooperate with prosecution decreased from twenty-seven percent of all domestic cases to fifteen percent. In the coming year, a stronger focus will be placed on immediate crisis intervention and emphasizing services prior to court hearings. An increased emphasis on providing follow-up services to non-cooperative victims after court hearings has resulted in increased referrals to the Office on Women's Domestic Violence Program and other community resources in 2000.

The part-time Law Clerk assists the prosecutor in preparing domestic violence cases and contacts civilian witnesses to ensure their appearance at trials. The full-time Victim Witness Specialist II contacts all victims 24 hours prior to their hearing in order to increase their cooperation with the prosecution, provides court advocacy, follow-up services, and coordinates data collection. The City's grant application requests funds to continue the part-time Law Clerk position and the full-time Victim Witness Specialist II position in the amount of \$63,762 for salary and benefits.

FISCAL IMPACT: To apply for this grant, the City must identify matching funds in the amount of \$20,922 in either in-kind services or a cash match. In the event of a grant award, the City's matching contribution will be provided by the in-kind donations of volunteer hours and the monetary value of postage, photocopying and time contributed by City staff associated with the Domestic Violence Intervention Project. The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services will provide 75 percent in grant funds in the amount of \$63,762 through its STOP Violence Against Women Grant Program for a total budget of \$84,684 (including the in-kind match).

In addition, the City is responsible for the normal administrative costs associated with this grant. These costs include financial and reporting oversight provided by the administering agency, the Office of Management and Budget and the Finance Department. It should be noted that there are no monies available in the City budget to continue these activities once the grant funds are expended. The grant-funded positions would terminate upon the expiration of the grant, and the individuals who fill the positions would be notified of this condition of employment.

ATTACHMENTS: None. The grant application may be reviewed in the Office of Management and Budget, Room 3600, City Hall, during normal business hours.

STAFF:

Claire Dunn, Coordinator, Domestic Violence Program
Virginia Coscia, Coordinator, Victim Witness Assistance Program
Sgt. Scott Gibson, Police Department
Lisa Stapleton, Adult Probation and Parole
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