

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 18, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: SUBMISSION OF A GRANT APPLICATION TO THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES FOR FUNDING FOR THE COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY'S OFFICE FOR THE VICTIM/WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

ISSUE: City Council consideration of a grant application to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services for continuation funding under the Victims of Crime Act and the Victim-Witness Fund in the amount of \$192,541 in FY2007 and \$173,287 in FY2008 for the Victim/Witness Assistance Program.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council authorize the City Manager to:

- (1) Submit a grant application to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services for funding in the amount of \$192,541 for FY2007 and \$173,287 for FY2008, for continued funding of the Victim/Witness Assistance Program;
- (2) Approve the continuation of four full-time grant-funded positions (one Collections Specialist II position, two Victim-Witness Specialist I positions, and one Victim-Witness Specialist II position) covered by the Victim/Witness Assistance Grant. These grant-funded positions would terminate upon the expiration of the grant, and the individuals who are to fill these positions would be notified of this condition of employment. It should be noted that there are no funds available in the City budget to continue these activities once the grant funds are expended; and
- (3) Execute all necessary documents that may be required.

It should be noted that the grant application is due on April 28, 2006.

DISCUSSION: The Victim/Witness Assistance Program, which is an integral part of the core function of the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, has three principal goals. The first goal is to assist the prosecutors in gaining and maintaining the cooperation of victims and witnesses to better ensure their cooperation throughout the criminal justice process. This is achieved through early contact with crime victims and by providing them with crisis intervention and referrals to

other agencies which provide services to crime victims. This includes supplying information on the State Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund and referrals to other human service agencies in the City. These services are provided to victims in solved as well as unsolved cases. The contact with victims and witnesses is maintained by providing them with criminal justice process information, case status updates, accompaniment to court, and dispositional information. In FY 2005, the Victim/Witness Program provided these services to over 6,700 victims and witnesses.

The second goal is to ensure the rights of Alexandria's crime victims. As examples, the Victim/Witness Assistance Program encourages victims to submit victim impact statements for sentencing hearings, affords victims the right to be notified of prisoners' release, intercedes on behalf of victims whose employers are reluctant to allow them time off to testify, coordinates the submission of restitution plans whereby defendants reimburse victims for their financial losses, and collects overdue restitution from those defendants who default on the plan. This program meets this statutorily mandated (§19.2-11.01) function of the Commonwealth's Attorney, which would have to be met by other staff if the funding for this program were eliminated.

The third goal of the Victim/Witness Assistance Program is community education and the establishment of coordinated services. The Victim/Witness Assistance Program routinely makes presentations on crime prevention to Alexandria's retirement homes, neighborhood watch groups, local civic associations and the Hispanic Community. This program also participates in the City's Domestic Violence Intervention Project, the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), the Elderly Victim Assistance Program, Alexandria Alliance Against Domestic Violence, and the Northern Virginia Center for Violent Death. Additionally, the Victim/Witness Assistance Program in conjunction with other Local, State, and Federal Agencies, provided crisis response and continues to assist victims of the 9/11 attacks. These are all coordinated responses to the needs of Alexandria's crime victims. During FY04 a grant audit was conducted by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services resulting in top ratings in all categories. The Grant Monitor noted in her final report "The City of Alexandria Victim/Witness Program is an exceptionally organized and efficiently run organization." She also states "The program's cooperative agreements are extremely comprehensive, and the program is commended for its collaboration with allied professionals working to serve crime victims."

The Alexandria Victim/Witness Assistance Program is staffed by a Victim-Witness Coordinator position, which is funded primarily by the State Compensation Board, three advocate positions (two Victim-Witness Specialist I positions and a Victim-Witness Specialist II position), and a Restitution Collections Specialist (Collections Specialist II), which are funded by a Victim/Witness Assistance Grant from the Department of Criminal Justice Services. The Department of Criminal Justice Services completed a staffing needs assessment for Virginia Victim/Witness Programs. According to the assessment, based on 1999 crime and court caseload statistics, the City of Alexandria needs six full-time staff to adequately provide services to Alexandria's crime victims.

During FY05 the Collections Specialist collected approximately \$118,000 in over-due restitution which was then disbursed to crime victims in Alexandria. From July 1, 2005, through April 7, 2006, the Collections Specialist has collected \$135,608 in over-due restitution. Without the resources provided by this grant, much of this money would not be collected.

In addition, program staff provided direct services to approximately 1,600 citizens during that same time period. In 1999, the Alexandria program was recognized by the Virginia Network for Victims and Witnesses of Crime, Inc., for outstanding service to crime victims. In addition, several members of the Program staff have received awards of special recognition by Local, State, and Federal Agencies.

This grant application for FY 2007 and FY 2008 will provide for the continuation of the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, which has been in operation since FY 1985.

Grant Period: July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007 and July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008.

FISCAL IMPACT: The City is requesting \$192,541 in FY2007 and \$173,287 in FY2008 in grant funding from the State Department of Criminal Justice Services. Although a cash match is not required, the City provides a cash contribution of approximately \$36,000 from State Compensation Board monies and approximately \$68,250 in additional General Fund monies for FY2007 and approximately \$107,000 during FY2008 to fully fund this program at current staffing and service levels. The request for increased funding in FY2008 is due to a mandatory 10% decrease in the funding source. In anticipation of the 10% decrease in funding during FY2008, we have eliminated one position from the program during FY2007 and shifted the responsibilities to an existing staff member in the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office. We have requested from DCJS that the funding previously granted for that position be redirected to the other four positions under the grant in order to help off-set the increasing financial burden to the City in FY2008 and future years. (In fiscal year 2006, the City will contribute approximately \$114,600).

The City is also responsible for the normal administrative costs associated with the grant from the Department of Criminal Justice Services. These costs include financial and reporting oversight provided by the administering agency, as well as by the Office of Management and Budget and by the Finance Department. It should be noted that there are no additional 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.

STAFF:

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