


*City of Alexandria, Virginia*MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 31, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF 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: Consideration of grant application (due April 18, 2008), to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (VDCJS), for funding for Victim-Witness Assistance Program.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council authorizes the City Manager to:

- (1) Submit a grant application to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services for funding in the amount of \$177,138 for FY2009 and \$177,138 for FY2010, 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 18, 2008.

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 2007, the Victim-Witness Program provided these services to over 4,250 victims and witnesses.

The second goal is to ensure the rights of Alexandria's crime victims. As examples, the Victim-Witness Assistance Program encourages and assists victims with submitting 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 responds to the scene of bank robberies to provide crisis intervention and debriefing to tellers and customers present during the robbery. These are all coordinated responses to the needs of Alexandria's crime victims. During our last grant audit 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 conducted a staffing needs assessment for Virginia Victim-Witness Programs and concluded that the City of Alexandria needs six full-time staff to adequately provide services to Alexandria's crime victims.

During FY07 the Collections Specialist collected approximately \$214,349 in overdue restitution which was then disbursed to crime victims in Alexandria. From July 1, 2007, through February

29, 2008, the Collections Specialist has collected \$115,897 in over-due restitution. Without the resources provided by this grant, much of this money would not be collected.

The Alexandria program has been 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 2009 and FY 2010 will provide for the continuation of the Victim-Witness Assistance Program, which has been in operation since FY 1985.

Grant Period: July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009 and July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010.

FISCAL IMPACT: The City is requesting \$177,138 in FY2009 and \$177,138 in FY2010 in grant funding from the State Department of Criminal Justice Services. Although a cash match is not required, the City will provide approximately \$118,800 in General Fund monies for FY2009 and approximately \$126,380 during FY2010 to fully fund this program at current staffing and service levels. In FY 2008, the City provided \$131,466 in City funding for these costs. The requested increase of \$7,580 in FY2010 is due to merit increases, if afforded to all City employees. During FY2007, the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office eliminated one position from this grant program and redistributed the grant funding to the other positions in order to help alleviate the City salary supplement.

Also of note, during the fiscal year 2008 budget cycle we requested and were granted a supplemental increase of approximately \$25,000 to cover decreasing grant funds. After this was approved, the granting agency restored the funds and we returned the supplement to the City during the supplemental appropriations ordinance.

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:

S. Randolph Sengel, Commonwealth's Attorney
Judith M. Holl, Victim-Witness Program Coordinator
Donald Harrison-Wright, Office Administrator, Commonwealth's Attorney's Office
Kendel Taylor, Budget Analyst, Management and Budget
Karen L. Winey, Grants Coordinator, Office of the City Manager