

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

13
4-23-02

DATE: APRIL 18, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

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 \$192,380 in FY2003 and \$185,343 in FY2004 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 \$192,380 for FY2003 and \$185,343 for FY2004, for continued funding of the Victim/Witness Assistance Program;
- (2) approve the continuation of the five full-time grant-funded positions (one Clerk Typist II position, a 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 was due on April 19, 2002. Due to the constrained time line for grant submission, staff submitted the grant application contingent upon City Council approval at its April 23 session.

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. 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 2001, the Victim/Witness Program provided these services to over 7,500 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.

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 Commission on Aging Public Safety Committee, and the Elderly Victim Assistance Program. These are all coordinated responses to the needs of Alexandria's crime victims.

The Alexandria Victim/Witness 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), a Restitution Collections Specialist (Collections Specialist II), and a program assistant position (Clerk Typist II), which are funded by a Victim/Witness Assistance Grant from the Department of Criminal Justice Services. The Department of Criminal Justice Services recently 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.

Last year, the Alexandria program provided written information on criminal justice procedures and the State Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund to over 9,000 crime victims and witnesses, including referrals made to other human service agencies in the City as well as outreach services to those victims of crime whose cases have never been solved.

In addition, program staff provided direct services to approximately 1,500 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.

This grant application for FY 2003 will provide for the continuation of the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, which has been in operation since FY 1985.

GRANT PERIOD: July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2004.

FISCAL IMPACT: The City is requesting \$192,380 in FY2003 and \$185,343 in FY2004 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 \$34,250 from State Compensation Board monies and approximately \$109,197 in additional General Fund monies each year, to fully fund this program at current staffing and service levels.

This 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.

ATTACHMENT: None. The grant application will be available for review in the Office of Management and Budget, Room 3600, City Hall, during normal office hours.

STAFF:

S. Randolph Sengel, Commonwealth's Attorney
Virginia M. Coscia, Victim/Witness Program Coordinator
Gene Swearingen, Director, Management and Budget
Kendel Taylor, Budget Analyst, Management and Budget