

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services
Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)
Listening Sessions Summary

December, 2015



INTRODUCTION

The Federal Crime Victims Fund (“Fund”) was established by the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984 and is one of the major funding sources for victim services throughout the United States. Revenues are deposited into the Fund annually from criminal fines, forfeited appearance bonds, penalties, special forfeitures, special assessments, and gifts, donations, and bequests by private parties. Fund dollars do not come from taxpayers.

Starting in 2000, the U.S. Congress placed a cap on funds available for distribution. These annual caps were intended to maintain the Fund as a stable source of support for future services. However, in recent years annual deposits to the Fund have soared. For example, in fiscal year 2012 annual deposits totaled \$2.795 billion. Additionally, over the last three years annual deposits to the Fund have averaged \$2.6 billion. Consequently the Fund balance currently exceeds \$12 billion.

The significant unmet needs of crime victims across the country and the substantial and growing balance in the Fund help to explain recent Congressional action contained in the Appropriations Act of 2015. Specifically, a provision of this Act raises the Fund cap from \$745 million to \$2.361 billion, an increase of 3.5 times. This is an unprecedented increase in the cap amount, which is resulting in significant increases to state allocations.

In August, Virginia received its federal fiscal year 2015 VOCA Fund allocation totaling \$50,330,687. This is more than four times as much as Virginia received in 2014 when the award totaled \$11,561,072.

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) is the designated VOCA Fund administrator for Virginia. DCJS uses VOCA funding to support direct service delivery, training, and technical assistance through local child abuse service programs, domestic violence programs, sexual assault crisis centers, and victim/witness programs.

To plan for, and responsibly and efficiently utilize, these funds for services and costs allowable under federal guidelines, DCJS staff are pursuing a series of near term and longer term strategies to identify and meet victim assistance needs in Virginia.

For example, in May of this year DCJS conducted an extensive survey of victim advocates statewide in order to identify needs. Additionally, in September and October, DCJS conducted four regional “Listening Sessions” in order to gather additional input from victim advocates and allied professionals across the state. Specifically, the Listening Sessions also provided opportunities to:

- Hear from advocates in the field about underserved populations and unmet needs
- Catalog recommended best uses of the additional funds
- Document long standing needs in Virginia
- Continue to promote and sustain partnerships among and between victim advocacy programs and organizations.

DCJS is also conducting ongoing research regarding funding plans in other states and are utilizing resources developed by the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators.

This report primarily summarizes input received at the regional Listening Sessions and outlines the current status of VOCA allocations and plans.

LISTENING SESSIONS

In order to gather input regarding victim assistance needs directly from stakeholders within communities across the state, DCJS facilitated four “Listening Sessions” around Virginia. These sessions provided an opportunity for current grantees, victim advocates, allied professionals, and the general public to offer comments, suggestions, and recommendations on utilizing the additional VOCA funds. Approximately 446 people attended the sessions. The four sessions were held in the following locations:

- Henrico County on Friday, September 18, 2015
- Roanoke on Tuesday, September 29, 2015
- Norfolk on Thursday, October 8, 2015
- Alexandria on Wednesday, October 28, 2015

During the Listening Sessions, DCJS staff provided a brief introduction and overview of VOCA funding. Following that, attendees were able to provide brief comments. The events were structured to provide a process through which comments could be received. Participants were provided information regarding VOCA required purpose areas and some background regarding funding history and the dramatic increase in funding becoming available. Within that context participants were free to offer any and all comments regarding VOCA management and funding priorities etc. These comments are summarized in the following sections by both VOCA purpose area and by theme. The needs, services, activities, and projects described reflect the comments received. Eligibility to receive VOCA funding and funding priorities are not addressed. The comments are illustrative of community needs but should not be viewed as exhaustive or exclusive.

SUMMARY BY VOCA PURPOSE AREA

VOCA outlines five purpose areas for use of the Crime Victims Fund:

1. Services to child abuse victims
2. Services to domestic violence victims
3. Services to sexual assault victims
4. Services to victims from underserved communities
5. Services to all other types of crime victims

Below is a summary of comments from all four Listening Sessions based on the five VOCA purpose areas.

1. Child Abuse Victims

Comments Related to Child Advocacy Centers (CAC)

- Additional CAC needed in rural areas
- Additional CAC needed for underserved areas
- Additional staff needed for existing CAC (case managers, family/child advocates, interpreters, trauma-trained therapists)
- Spread CAC services across Virginia
- Need for additional trained forensic interviewers
- Child Abuse Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) coordinators
- Accreditation in mental health treatment

Comments Related to Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Programs

- More CASA staff needed to recruit, train, and manage volunteers
- Sustainability for CASA programs
- Training needed for CASA volunteers
- More office space for CASA programs
- Increase in salary and benefits needed for CASA staff
- CASA program expansion (currently 40% of Virginia not served by CASA)
- Additional support for volunteer recruitment and retention
- Improved technology

Comments Related to Child Abuse Victim Needs

- Services for older youth in foster care
- Intensive outpatient “Trauma Resource Center” for children
- Immediate response services for children (trauma-informed trained staff are called to the scene to provide immediate assistance to child victims/witnesses of violence)
- 24/7 crisis intervention for every child abuse victim that needs it
- Home-based, long-term care to expectant or new parents to interrupt cycle of violence/trauma

Comments Related to Child Abuse Service Staff Needs

- Training for members of child abuse multidisciplinary teams (MDT)
- Training on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) factors
- Trauma-trained child therapists
- Case managers needed
- Qualified mental health professionals to work with young victims of crime
- Child forensic nurse examiners needed
- Training on child-first interviewing

Comments Related to Other Needs

- Prevention and intervention services / funding for primary prevention
- Funded community networks / child resilience community networks / trauma-informed community networks
- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
- Expansion of current child abuse programs
- Child therapists based in law enforcement offices
- Prevention and education for 11-18 year olds / education in schools
- Need for increase in technology and infrastructure
- Centralized referral services to help connect people to services available
- Universal screening tools needed
- More staff for Children's Trust Fund

2. Domestic Violence Victims

Comments Related to Domestic Violence (DV) Victim Needs

- Transportation needs for victims / an agency vehicle to transport victims
- Mental health services needed
- More case management services needed
- More community-based services needed
- Safe exchange centers
- Need for civil attorneys; civil legal aid should be a core service
- Housing-related needs (emergency, transitional, rapid re-housing)
- Job training and financial literacy classes for victims

Comments Related to DV Service Staff Needs

- Increase in salaries for DV staff, competitive salaries needed
- Fringe benefits for DV staff
- Specialized training on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Dedicated DV attorneys
- Funding a team (advocate, mental health provider, attorney, law enforcement officer) to respond to DV
- Staff needed to coordinate regional efforts
- Training needed for trauma-informed care
- Training for basic victim advocacy/rights
- Bi-lingual and Spanish-speaking advocates

Comments Related to Other Needs

- Support for lethality assessment programs
- Awareness campaigns
- More local/regional hotlines
- More services for military victims
- Community awareness efforts
- Enhance existing services
- Increase capacity for programs that provide trauma-informed care
- Funding for large faith-based DV conference
- Funds to address consistent training for first responders
- Training for first responders on identifying the predominant aggressor
- Ongoing technical assistance
- 24/7 crisis intervention for every victim that needs it
- Support for coordinated community response teams (paid coordinators, members)
- Family advocacy centers/centralized service centers
- Elder abuse coordinated community response teams
- Focus on regional system wide planning and enhancement
- Systems level improvement; legal aid, police, courts
- Infrastructure and capital needs: shelter space
- Fund projects that are demonstrating good outcomes

3. Sexual Assault Victims

Comments Related to Sexual Assault (SA) Victim Needs

- Mental health services needed
- More case management services needed
- More community-based services needed
- Transitional housing
- Transportation
- Comments Related to SA Service Staff Needs
- Increased salaries for SA staff, competitive salaries needed
- Administrative staff/support needed
- Staff needed to coordinate regional efforts
- Training for basic victim advocacy/rights
- Additional forensic nurse examiners and forensic nursing programs needed
- Bi-lingual and Spanish-speaking advocates
- More advocates needed to assist with navigating the criminal justice system
- Ability to attend national trainings

Comments Related to Other Needs

- More local/regional hotlines
- More services for military victims
- Community awareness efforts
- Law enforcement training on SA and Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviewing (FETI)
- Prosecutor training on SA and Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviewing (FETI)
- Funds to address consistent training for first responders
- Support for sexual assault response teams (SART) / paid coordinators
- Support for collaborative responses to campus sexual assault
- Centers for adults similar to CAC/centralized services
- Fund projects that are demonstrating good outcomes
- Improved technology
- Alternative service delivery models (victim retreats, equine therapy, etc.)
- Support for succession planning

4. Underserved Victims

Comments Related to Underserved Victim Needs

- Transportation needed for rural programs
- Transitional housing for victims in rural areas
- Legal assistance needs

Comments Related to Staff Needs

- Spanish-speaking staff members to provide services; interpreters
- More staff to serve rural victims
- Training for advocates on serving immigrant victims, deaf/hard of hearing, LEP, and other underserved populations

Comments Related to Other Needs

- Services for elder abuse victims, to include financial exploitation
- Culturally-specific services for queer and transgender victims
- Funds to provide services to LGBTQ youth that are victims of hate/bias crimes
- Elder abuse coordinated community response teams
- Services for incarcerated victims
- Services for boys and men
- Services for child victims in rural areas
- Legal services for immigrant victims
- Services for victims of human trafficking

5. All other crime victims

Comments Related to Victim/Witness Programs

- Additional staff needed; V/W staff levels have remained flat while prosecutor offices are growing in staff size
- Technology improvements (CIMS)
- Need additional staff to serve victims that need civil protective orders
- Salary/benefit increases
- Need more bi-lingual/bi-cultural staff; need for interpreters
- Transportation needs
- Assistance for victims with hotels, interpreter services, and witness protection
- Training opportunities for staff

Comments Related to Other Needs

- Services for victims of human trafficking, both juvenile and adult victims
- Residential treatment facility that serves victims of human trafficking
- Emergency shelters for victims of human trafficking
- Treatment services for high risk victims of human trafficking
- Witness relocation and witness protection
- More services to victims of property crimes
- Services for immigrant victims
- Data collection enhancements
- Funding for legal services for victims / additional staff in Legal Aid offices
- Advocacy for victims of gun violence; expanding/new partnerships regarding gun violence
- Funding for faith-based initiatives
- Increase funding for mental health and substance abuse services
- Establish central registry for elder abuse offenders
- Restorative justice programs to include victim component; restorative circles/conferences for juveniles
- Long-term trauma counseling for all victims who need it (do not limit number of sessions)

SUMMARY BY THEME

Below is a summary of comments from all four Listening Sessions based on several themes that emerged repeatedly during the Sessions.

1. Victim Services

(This theme includes comments related to specific services needed for any/all types of victims. This also includes service gaps that have been identified.)

- Civil legal assistance for domestic violence victims (custody & divorce)
- Civil legal assistance should be a core victim service
- Victims' needs include transportation, transitional housing, mental health and substance abuse services, interpreter services, witness protection and relocation, emergency housing
- Increased culturally-specific and targeted services for elder abuse victims, immigrant victims, limited English speaking victims, queer and transgender victims, military victims, boys and men
- Criminal justice system-level improvements
- More local/regional hotlines
- More forensic interviewing services needed
- More shelters/services for human trafficking victims, both juvenile and adult
- Funds to assist victims with workforce skills
- Services for older youth in foster care
- Home-based, long-term care to expectant or new parents to interrupt cycle of violence/trauma
- Funds to provide services to LGBTQ youth and those that are victims of hate/bias crimes
- Safe exchange centers
- Education, awareness, and prevention
- Long-term trauma counseling for all victims who need it (do not limit number of sessions)
- Additional forensic nurse examiners and forensic nursing programs needed or sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE)

2. Capacity Building

(This theme includes comments related to building capacity to serve any/all types of victims.)

- Need additional staff in all existing (currently-funded) programs, including administrative staff expenses
- Increase salary and benefits for all existing and new staff
- Competitive salaries needed to recruit and retain staff
- Expand the capacity of existing programs to increase the scale and scope of services
- Volunteer recruitment
- Need additional staff to serve victims that need civil protective orders
- Need more bi-lingual/bi-cultural staff; Spanish-speaking advocates needed
- Increase capacity for programs that provide trauma-informed care
- Funding needed to maintain 24-hour services
- Staff needed to coordinate regional efforts, including multidisciplinary teams, sexual assault response teams, and other coordinated community response efforts
- Infrastructure and capital improvements
- Qualified mental health professionals to work with young victims of crime
- Improved technology and data collection systems
- Need attorneys to assist victims
- Support to implement lethality assessment programs
- Additional forensic nurse examiners and forensic nursing programs needed

- More staff for Children's Trust Fund

3. Training

(This theme includes comments related to training needs, gaps, and/or training goals.)

- Establish an advocate 'training center' or regional training centers
- Specialized training on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Training for members of coordinated community response teams
- Trauma-informed care training
- Training on basic victim advocacy/rights
- Basic skills training for advocates
- Specialty training for advocates in working with special populations
- Funding for large faith-based DV conference
- Training on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) factors
- FETI training for law enforcement officers and prosecutors
- Training for advocates on serving immigrant victims, deaf/hard of hearing, LEP, and other underserved populations
- Funding to address consistent training for first responders
- Training on identifying the predominant aggressor
- Training on forensic interviewing of children
- "Child first" interview training
- Opportunities to attend national trainings
- Mental health first aid training

4. Collaborations

(This theme includes comments related to proposed collaborative projects.)

- Funding coordinated community response teams, including MDT and SART
- Paid coordinators of coordinated community response teams, including MDT and SART
- Lethality assessment teams
- Funding to increase community collaborations
- Regional hotlines and other regional efforts
- Child resilience community networks
- Trauma-informed community networks
- Regional/community action work and community organizing
- Elder abuse coordinated community response teams
- Shared services – implementing regional approaches
- Expand/new partnerships regarding gun violence

- Develop a statewide plan and approach to providing comprehensive legal services to victims

5. Other

- Awareness campaigns
- Data collection systems and/or enhancements
- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
- Developing curricula
- New resource materials, including brochures and other publications
- Legal services (custody & divorce)
- Rapid re-housing initiatives
- Witness relocation
- Funding for prevention efforts
- Succession & strategic planning
- Renovation & building improvements
- Post-incarceration services
- Simplify grant application and reporting requirements/streamline
- Establish central registry for elder abuse offenders
- Grants should take a comprehensive view of victimization if possible, instead of focused on specific type of crime
- Consider soliciting for research-based, trauma-informed initiatives
- Restorative justice programs to include victim component; restorative circles/conferences for juveniles
- Develop universal screening tools

Conclusion

Please note, some of the input in the categories may not be allowable under VOCA.

The material provided in the previous sections of this report reflects stakeholder identified needs, activities and projects which can support and inform a conceptual framework for improving services to all victims of crime; enhancing services and community responses to traditionally underserved victims, strengthening partnerships, and fostering a more responsive and coordinated approach to the provision of services to victims of crime in Virginia.

In accordance with Listening Session input and other research to date, in broad terms, DCJS is currently:

Developing grant application guidelines to support funding of new initiatives and projects addressing the needs of unserved and underserved populations, as identified through the survey, Listening Sessions, and subsequent research.

Developing funding formulas to allocate adequate funding to support direct service delivery through existing programs including Victim/Witness Programs, Sexual Assault Crisis Centers, Domestic Violence Shelters, and CASA projects serving crime victims in priority categories, as required by the VOCA statute and guidelines.

DCJS' ongoing data gathering and planning processes are intended to be dynamic and to be updated and informed by emerging best practices, research, and input from Virginia victims, victim advocates, and allied professionals in the crime victim services field.

Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services - Final Report also provides a useful national perspective informing our work and describing the future of the field. Vision 21 was a massive four year strategic initiative, commencing in 2013 and conducted by the United States Department of Justice's (DOJ's) Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), the federal agency charged with implementing VOCA. Vision 21 systematically evaluated the state of victim services nationally, and thus outlines a trajectory for the evolution of crime victim service programming.

Our collaborative efforts to date have already resulted in revisions and increases to current Fiscal Year 2016 VOCA grant awards. Through continued partnership we will increase the scope and scale of victim services available across Virginia, filling gaps and expanding existing programs and supporting new programs and/or organizations addressing community identified critical needs.