



CRIME VICTIM PROGRAMS STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Issue

On June 13, 2011, the State Auditor's Office released a performance audit report of crime victims programs. The audit evaluated the Crime Victim Compensation (CVC), Office of Crime Victims Advocacy (OCVA), Domestic Violence Emergency Shelter, and the Domestic Violence Services for Marginalized Populations programs.

This paper serves to comment on the report findings.

Crime Victims Compensation Findings:

WCSAP has significant concern about reductions to benefits and the continual trend of reducing demonstrated needed benefits for victims of crime in our State.

- Given the state's fiscal reality, we have worked with legislators over the past two sessions to pass temporary changes to Crime Victims Compensation (CVC) benefits and it is our position that these changes should be temporary given their negative impact on all crime victims.
- Crime Victims Compensation pays for sexual assault forensic exams to provide prosecutors with the forensic evidence they need to hold offenders accountable. We strongly disagree with capping these exams at \$800.00. Approximately 25% of these exams currently exceed that cap, the savings from a cap are estimated to be \$167,000 per year. That 25 % of patients and all sexual assault victims should not have to worry about the quality of care they are receiving or if the services they need will be covered by the \$800.00 limit; similarly, medical providers should be equitably reimbursed for services rendered. Failure to provide fair reimbursements jeopardizes the breadth and quality of forensic exams and may compromise provider willingness to conduct these exams. The costs and implications of inadequate evidence collection far exceed the proposed savings. Funds that cover these exams are generated from offender fines, not tax dollars. Washington State should continually recognize the need to fully cover exam fees for these heinous crimes. Both CVC and the legislature have rejected similar proposals in the past due to the negative impact on victims and the prosecutorial process.

Program Consolidation Findings:

The audit proposes a savings of \$188,000 annually, after a one-time moving cost of \$25,500, if victim services housed at the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy are moved to the Department of Social and Health Services. This move has long-term ramifications for sexual assault monies and services in Washington State and we strongly oppose this proposal.

- Despite the change in mission and focus for what is now the Department of Commerce, the department remains a preferred home for sexual assault funding and the many other programs housed at OCVA such as victim witness programming and crime victim service centers.

- When OCVA was created the legislature purposely chose to house OCVA at the Department of Community Trade and Economic Development (now known as Commerce) and not DSHS.
- In 1996, sexual assault services were deliberately moved out of DSHS over to OCVA within commerce to best support quality service delivery. This was based on recommendations from the Sexual Assault Services Advisory Committee. WCSAP supported the efforts bringing forward legislation for this move. The legislature recognized the need and supported the move.
- The Office of Crime Victim Advocacy has been a strong stable home for sexual assault monies in our state. Their service and dedication to maintaining and growing funding for victims is commendable.
- Due to the leadership and vision of OCVA, Washington State sexual assault service delivery is solidly structured to ensure that needs of sexual assault victims are met and that comprehensive victim-centered services can be accessed uniformly across the state.
- Valuing the work of practitioners in the field, OCVA partnered with community programs to create service standards and an accreditation process to further ensure accountability to victims and the state. Washington's sexual assault standards and accreditation system are recognized as the best in the nation.
- OCVA has long championed the needs of sexual assault victims and other victims of crime in our state and the results are significant. Crime victims funding and services have grown under their leadership.
- It is essential that sexual assault monies be housed in a department that champions and protects the interests and funds of the administering agency. DSHS is not satisfactorily aligned with the needs of sexual assault victims for sexual assault service delivery in Washington State.

Streamlining Services

WCSAP is a membership organization. Many of our members provide sexual assault, domestic violence, and other crimes services at the local level. We fully understand, desire, and support making operations as streamlined as possible so that advocates can spend more time on direct services rather than on administration. Both DSHS and OCVA have begun working collaboratively to streamline operations where possible.

Sexual assault funding is comprised of multiple federal pools and thus has a multitude of diverse federal reporting requirements and measures of accountability that, despite OCVA's best efforts to reduce duplications or time needed on the part of local programs, will continue to be a reality. However, both DSHS and OCVA have taken strides to improve efficiency by streamlining operations as much as possible. They intend to:

- Coordinate and release due dates for DSHS and Commerce grant/contract renewal applications by spring of 2012
- Review on-site contract monitoring schedules to minimize multiple site visits to the same program by September 2011
- Evaluate feasibility and cost/benefit of developing a single application and common steps for contractor use by spring 2012
- To explore options for coordinating grant monitoring by spring 2012

Innovative Solutions

In the June 23, 2011 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) hearing, Representative Alexander, recognizing the problematic complexity of the consolidation proposal, expressed his concern with moving programs that may have a better mission fit into an organization that functions less efficiently. He offered the suggestion of consolidating all victim services under an ombudsman.

Perhaps now is the time to think about a third way, neither housed at DSHS nor Commerce, but rather a small agency for all victim-related services, including CVC. We welcome the opportunity to engage in such a discussion and strongly feel that such a discussion needs to involve the full array of impacted parties (system, coalition, and local program stakeholders).

For now, Commerce is a stable, supportive home for OCVA and the other victim services they house. It is our preferred “home” for sexual assault funding at this time.

Solution

- Oppose capping sexual assault exam reimbursements at \$800.00.
- Don't make permanent CVC benefit reductions made in 2010.
- Oppose transfer of the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy to the Department of Health and Social Services.
- Engage in looking at other consolidation models for all victims of crime programming.
- Involve system, coalition, and local program stakeholders in dialog regarding consolidation.

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