

**WCSAP**  
Washington Coalition of  
Sexual Assault Programs

Dear Friends,

On June 13, 2011, the State Auditor's Office released a performance audit 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.

The audit was conducted with the goals of determining:

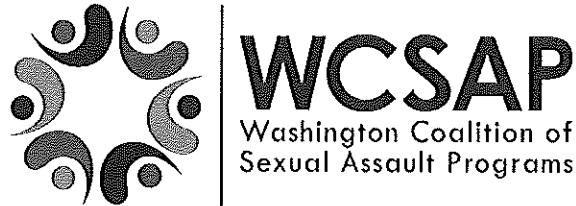
- 1) What is the long-term financial sustainability of the CVC program at the Department of Labor and Industries? Does the state have opportunities to increase revenue and lower costs?
- 2) Could consolidation or other reorganization of programs that serve victims of crime and domestic violence reduce administrative costs and or improve services to victims?

The auditor's report presents findings and puts forward recommendations for improving financial sustainability of the CVC program. These recommendations include extending or making permanent the benefit reductions made in 2010, capping existing benefits, and permitting the Labor and Industries Director to reduce benefit levels when there is a monetary shortfall. In addition, the report highlights savings that may be achieved by moving OCVA-housed programs to DSHS.

#### **Crime Victims Compensation:**

WCSAP has significant concern about reductions to benefits and the continual trend of dismantling needed benefits for victims of crime in our State. We fully understand the declining economy and the need to make budget reductions; however, cutting critical victim funding--which is generated from offender fees--is not in the best interest of victims. Given the state's fiscal reality, we have worked with legislators over the last two years to pass temporary changes to CVC benefits and requested that sunset dates be put in place for any reductions made, so that in times of a more robust budget funds could be restored. We are deeply concerned that benefits of the victim compensation program intended to collect evidence and to support victims are steadily eroding. The current Governor veto of benefit sunset dates along with audit recommendations to make 2010 reductions permanent creates a situation in which victims will not have access to adequate benefits. The CVC program was established to support victims. When benefits are continually pared down due to budget needs, we lose the intent of the funding and the ability to support victims with their needs. Reductions to this program have real and significant impacts in the lives of victims.

Crime Victims Compensation (CVC) 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 exam benefits 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 reimbursement jeopardizes the breadth and quality of victim 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 recognize the need to fully cover exams fees for these heinous crimes. Both CVC and the legislature have rejected similar proposals in the past.

#### **Program Consolidation:**

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.

OCVA is currently housed at the Department of Commerce. Prior to 2010, the Department of Commerce was the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development. With the change in name came a refinement of the department's mission to focus on jobs. Given the mission refinement, several programs currently housed in the department, including OCVA, no longer appear to fit into the department's mission and thus are being evaluated for transfer. Despite the change in mission and focus at Commerce, the department remains a preferred home for sexual assault funding. Any move of a program is significant and should be balanced with total benefits garnered.

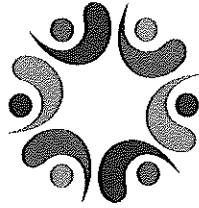
When OCVA was created in 1990, the legislature purposely chose to house OCVA at the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (now known as Commerce) and not DSHS.

In 1996, sexual assault services were deliberately moved out of DSHS over to OCVA. This was based on recommendations from the sexual assault services advisory committee and put in place by the legislature to best support quality of service delivery. WCSAP supported these efforts by bringing forward legislation for this move. The legislature recognized the need and supported the move.

The Office of Crime Victims 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 continues to partner with and request feedback from the field on how to enhance and improve services and operations. 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 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.



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### *Streamlining Services*

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
- 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 at 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.

Sincerely,

Andrea Piper-Wentland  
Executive Director