



Testimony on FY19 Budget  
House Committee on Appropriations

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**The Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services** administers the Victims Compensation Program, the Restitution Unit, and the Victim Assistance Program, as well as several state and federal grant programs for direct service to all crime victims. The Center works with both businesses and individuals, regardless of the type of crime, and provides specialized services for eligible victims.

**The Center** serves as a voice within government for the needs of crime victims in Vermont. The Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services serves the state by:

1. Providing **direct services** to victims of crime;
2. Organizing and providing **training** for volunteers, community members, advocates, allied professions and others on issues related to working with crime victims; and
3. Soliciting and issuing **grants** for community and statewide programs working with crime victims.

#### **1. DIRECT SERVICES**

**The Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services** provides three distinct direct services for victims of crime: Victims Compensation, Victim Assistance, and Restitution Enforcement and Advancement.

**Goal:** To help victims of crime rebuild their lives and to mitigate the financial, physical, and psychological impacts of crime.

**Objective:** Support victims by compensating uninsured financial losses (medical, counseling, safety, etc.) and providing trained advocates throughout the state

**The Victims Compensation Program** is funded through the Center's special fund appropriation. The program provides limited financial assistance to victims who have experienced an uninsured financial loss as a direct result of a violent crime. Staff members verify claims through a comprehensive investigative process, and approved payments are made either to service providers or directly to the victim. The number of new claims received annually

fluctuates between 450 and 500 claims each year. State dollars paid to victims from the Victims Compensation Fund also leverage federal reimbursement at a rate of 60%.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

480 Claims	\$513,318 disbursed
Categories for 5 largest disbursements:	
Funeral expenses:	\$85,194
Counseling:	\$83,690
Sexual Assault:	\$82,303
Medical:	\$54,972
Wages:	\$52,177

Victim Satisfaction Survey 55 returned

- Received written notification about application in reasonable amount of time: 80% agreed
- Compensation Program staff were able to answer their questions: 93% agreed
- Staff responded to their request for assistance: 89% agreed
- Rated quality of services as excellent or good: 86% agreed
- Rated staff attitude as excellent or good: 96%
- Satisfied or very satisfied with the services they received: 89% agreed

Comments from victims:

- The most helpful part was help with funeral costs and clean-up of the property.
- The best help for was reimbursement for lost wages and installation of an alarm system.
- An online application would be great.
- The program was the easiest thing about the whole ordeal.
- The program should not be so difficult to help a victim. I feel that after going through the process of applying, it was as if I became an “emotional victim” again. It was time consuming, a lot of paperwork and hassle for a small claim.
- Although I feel satisfied, I feel the system is not fair to the victim. Even though it was a second home, our house was violated and the person has not been punished in any way for the crime. It is horrible to think that offenders can “get away” with this type of crime with just a slap on the wrist – where is the justice?
- It was helpful to discuss the situation with someone – even though I still feel the offender made out in my situation and I was left behind.

**The Victim Assistance Program** is funded through the Center’s special fund appropriation and Federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds. Twenty-seven victim advocates working in State’s Attorneys Offices throughout the state assist victims through the criminal justice process. Advocates help ensure that basic victim rights (Title 13, Ch. 165) are observed, including the right to be informed, to be present, to be consulted, and to be heard at sentencing. In the larger counties, specialized victim advocates work exclusively with victims of domestic violence, child abuse, or sexual assault in order to respond to their unique needs.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

Number of victims served: 5,166

Victim Satisfaction Survey 102 returned

- Received notice in advance of court dates: 89% agreed
- Provided information on court process: 83% agreed
- Were able to understand the information provided: 87% agreed
- Received information about Victim's Compensation: 75% agreed
- Received information on your right to complete a Victim Impact Statement: 84% agreed
- Were satisfied with the assistance provided by victim advocate: 86%

Comments from victims:

- After such a horrible traumatic experience, I was astonished at the wonderful caring from all involved in the legal process. The staff involved were phenomenal – keep up the good work.
- The Advocate was outstanding for her knowledge and understanding and keeping us informed. She always got back to us and answered our questions.
- The advocate was almost impossible to reach but I accept it because I know there are more serious cases than mine. The defendant was found incompetent and the case dropped.
- I didn't expect to receive these services at all and I am most grateful for them.
- I was impressed and comforted by how well informed I was kept. It provided me with a sense of relief and reassurance as the victim.
- I felt the whole process was very misleading. I very clearly communicated what I wanted to happen to get through the process but I felt that I got pushed around, "you need to do this, you don't need to," which caused a lot of frustration and more times of being upset about the situation.

**The Restitution Unit**, authorized in 2003, is funded by the Center's Restitution Special Fund. The Unit collects restitution owed to victims by criminal offenders, enforces restitution orders, and processes claims for Special Fund advancements of up to \$5,000 to eligible victims. The court sends Restitution Judgment Orders to the Unit, fund advances to victims are made as allowed by law, and the Unit collects from offenders to reimburse the Fund. Where the victim is not eligible for fund advancement, or the order exceeds the \$5,000 cap, the Unit collects on behalf of the victim, (much like the Office of Child Support,) so that victims do not have to undertake this difficult work on their own.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

2017 Restitution orders (new orders only): 325 orders (Special Fund eligible)  
689 orders (General Enforcement eligible)

Restitution ordered: \$1,496,520

Restitution collected (new) \$ 123,255  
Restitution collected (old) \$ 849,371

2005-2017 (still collecting)  
Total orders: 17,837  
Restitution ordered: \$24,171,359  
Restitution collected: \$ 9,231,391

## 2. TRAINING

**The Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services** provides basic and advanced training opportunities on issues related to crime victimization for advocates, community members, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers.

**Goal:** To provide a variety of training and technical assistance opportunities throughout Vermont to expand and enhance services for victims of crime based on national best practice and local law

**Objective:** Increase knowledge and skills of advocates, staff, and allied professionals to help ensure quality services and support for victims of crime

**The Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services** staff work with consultants and seasoned victim service professionals designing and delivering training opportunities. In addition, staff provide facilitation and logistics for events and work cooperatively across the state to ensure basic and advanced training.

### PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

Number of technical assistance requests:	33
Number of trainings provided to service providers:	15
Number of training events held:	16
Number of participants:	469
Number of orgs receiving training and technical asst.	43

Types of trainings offered: Vermont Victim Assistance Academy (8 days); Human Trafficking; Cyber Safety; Civil Rights Compliance; Foundations of Dialogue Education (4 days); Surefire Meetings; Scaling up Restorative Justice Workshop

## 3. GRANTS

**The Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services** administers State and Federal grants to non-profits, prosecutors, law enforcement, and associated agencies.

**Goal:** To increase victim safety and ensure access to quality victim services statewide.

**Objective:** Identify and support agencies across the state and provide grant compliance, technical assistance, and monitoring.

**State and Federal Grants** administered by the Center support a comprehensive, statewide network of accessible victim services. Our centralized model is efficient and maximizes geographic and demographic equity across program proposes. Center staff monitor all grant recipients for financial and programmatic compliance with state and federal guidelines. The Center provides technical assistance to non-profit victim service agencies and government partners to help them seek additional funding from outside sources.

State Grant Programs:

- State Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program
- The Supervised Visitation Grant
- Child Advocacy Center Program
- Act 174: domestic violence prevention

Federal Grant Programs:

- Victims of Crime Act Formula Assistance Grant
- STOP Violence Against Women Formula Grant
- Family Violence Prevention and Services Act
- Rural Domestic Violence and Child Victimization Grant.
- Sexual Assault Services Program Formula Grant.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

Number of organizations or agencies receiving grants:	55
Number of victims receiving assistance:	17,233
Number of services provided:	137,337

Top 5 services provided:

- Emergency shelter bednights: 37,337
- Advocacy: 32,209
- Hotline crisis counseling: 13,015
- Crisis intervention: 7,162
- Legal advocacy: 4,616

Victim Satisfaction Survey from Network Programs 3,396 returned

- 86% reported yes when asked “Do you know more about planning for your safety”
- 98% reported yes when asked “Do you know more about resources available to you”
- 97% reported yes when asked “Do you know more about your rights and options”

## **FY19 KEY BUDGET ISSUES**

The Center's FY19 budget General Funds are level-funded. The Center's operations are almost entirely funded with state Special Funds and federal grants; nearly all General Fund appropriations are pass-through to state sub-grantees. VCCVS general fund appropriations have been virtually level-funded since FY15.

The Center requests a general fund increase (not included in the proposed budget) of \$137,240 to support step and COLA salary/benefit increases for the Victim Assistance Program (victim advocates).

The Center's budget, as well as many of our statewide grant recipients, rely on federal funding. The current federal uncertainty and the lack of a final, approved federal FY18 budget could impact the Center's state expenditure projections.

### **FEDERAL GRANTS**

**Victims of Crime Act:** The State of Vermont's federal VOCA grant formula allocation decreased from \$4.7 million to \$3.9 million this past year. 2018 funding has not been awarded, nor have we heard any estimates for the 2019 award. Currently, nearly all of Vermont's federal VOCA formula grant allocation is committed in the form of sub-grants to direct service providers around the state. The Center's VOCA grant-making process is guided by a comprehensive plan prepared by independent consultants who engaged stakeholders to identify gaps in services. The Center introduced several new grant initiatives in FY17 based on the plan that will continue into FY18, including a new Legal Services Network hosted by Vermont LawLine and Vermont Legal Aid, a Director of Victim Services for the Vermont State Police Major Crimes Unit, a Human Trafficking caseworker, more children's advocates in domestic and sexual violence programs, a full-time Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Training Coordinator, and an initiative focused on elder abuse. Irrespective of federal VOCA funds, the cost of needed services statewide exceeds the funds available.

**Violence Against Women Act:** VCCVS continues to identify gaps in services statewide, especially as competitive federal grants awarded directly to local service providers, such as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grants, are on the decline. These funds were awarded for a three-year period in 2017 and will go out to bid again in 2019 to be awarded in 2020.

### **LARGEST IDENTIFIED BUDGET ISSUE**

**Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs (SAS):** The state's long-term funding strategy for the Victim Assistance Program (VAP), which provides victim advocate services mandated by Title 13, Ch. 165, remains unsustainable. As the cost of funding existing victim advocate positions continues to increase each year, revenues into the Victims Compensation Special Fund, which is the intended source of state funding for the VAP, are on a long-term declining

trend. In SFY15, VCCVS received a one-time General Fund allocation of \$567,250 to support this program due to special fund shortfalls, and in SFY16, \$567,500 was offset with an increase from the Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) federal grant. The state's reliance on federal funding that continued into SFY17 and SFY18 is a less-than-desirable trend for a 30-year-old, statutorily-mandated state program, especially in the current federal climate. Furthermore, despite increasing demand for services—particularly with the opiate crisis and more aggressive domestic violence prosecution efforts—staffing levels have not increased in over a decade. In SFY18, VCCVS also had to award an additional \$113,000 in VOCA federal funds to SAS to cover a gap identified by SAS later in the budget cycle.

Because of level-funding, the proposed SFY19 budget for the VAP grant already shows a shortfall of \$137,240. The Center did request this amount as a one-time state general fund appropriation. Without a general fund appropriation, advocate positions will need to be cut.

## **VERMONT SPECIAL FUND SUPPORTED GRANTS**

### **Victims Compensation Special Fund**

VCCVS proposes a Compensation Special Fund increase of only \$126K, based on a 3-year average of deposits into the fund. The Victims Compensation Fund raised \$2 million in revenue in SFY17. As a cautionary note, two of the three years comprising the average showed declining revenues with an increase only in SFY17. Furthermore, in SFY17, the number of Victim Compensation claims increased by 18%, with a corresponding increase in the total paid to victims of approximately \$50,000. Although the SFY 19 VOCA Victim Compensation federal award (a reimbursement grant) is \$155,000 less than SFY18, VCCVS does anticipate an increase in the SFY20 budget. Overall, with declining revenues and uncertainty as to the total number of claims and dollar amounts to be paid each year, maintaining the health of the Victims Compensation Special Fund continues to be a challenge.

### **Restitution Special Fund**

VCCVS proposes increasing the Restitution Special Fund appropriation by \$88K, also based on a 3-year average, with two of those three years showing declining revenues until last year. In SFY17 restitution payments to crime victims increased by \$65K. This fund raised \$2.2 million in revenue in SFY17. Anecdotally, the Restitution Unit has seen an increase in restitution judgment orders arising from property and financial crimes fueled by the opiate crisis, which could drive increases in advance payments to crime victims into the future.

### **Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund**

Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund appears to have stabilized after several years of not meeting its level-funded appropriation of \$867,758. Therefore, CCVS proposes level-funding the DV/SV Fund again this year. This pass-through revenue stream supports prevention programming, as well as the DV Trainer position at the Vermont Police Academy who facilitates

mandatory training for both new recruits and certified officers. Prior to SFY17, revenue averaged \$794,000. In SFY17, an increase of \$15 to the marriage license fee (approved for July 1, 2016) generated an additional \$60,000 over the previous year to help meet this appropriation.

**Administrative**

In SFY19, C CVS personal services increased \$119,000 to include replacing a grant paid position that ended in SFY17. The new position is in response to the increased administrative burden required to monitor the significant increase in federal VOCA formula funds that the state has received in recent years. The number of sub-grantees has increased significantly, as have federal financial monitoring and programmatic reporting requirements. A 2.5% COLA and 2% step increase for VCCVS employees is included in the budget.

The SFY19 operating cost increased slightly by \$33,000 to include annual increases and surcharges in rental space, travel expenses to federally-required meetings, conferences, and trainings. The SFY19 budget also reflects the absence of a \$31,000 VOCA training grant received in prior years, which funded state-wide trainings for victim services providers throughout the state.