



**Chris Fenno, Executive Director
Senate Judiciary Committee – May 20, 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to present updated information on how Covid-19 has affected victim services in Vermont. As with everything having to do with these times, things change almost daily. What hasn't changed is the need for services for victims of crime. What hasn't changed are the calls to hotlines for help. What hasn't changed is the need for advocacy and assistance. What has changed is the cost of providing the services, the locations the services are provided in, and the need for nimble advocates to find creative and new ways to assist.

UPDATED: Covid-19 Budget and Services Issues

Grantees: The Center subgrants to non-profit and government agencies in order to provide a wide array of victim services throughout the state.

Network Programs

By far, the domestic and sexual violence providers have been hardest hit with additional costs due to COVID-19, both for this fiscal year and the first six months of 2021. Based on what the programs have seen over the last two months their increased costs cover the following services are broken down between fiscal years as follows:

1. Shelter costs – Shelters are spending and anticipate spending additional funds on specialized cleaning, cleaning supplies, and the replacement of items, like sheets, which must be removed if a survivor tests positive. They are also purchasing masks and gloves.
2. Crisis Pay to Staff – Advocates have been named Essential Personnel by the State of Vermont, and member organizations will be paying staff who are venturing out into the community to meet the needs of survivors, including delivering food to hotels where survivors are now housed, attending RFA hearings in-person, meeting with people at shelters, etc.
3. Direct Aid to Survivors – Survivors' needs for safe housing, food security, gas cards, etc. has grown significantly. Survivors are beginning to move out into communities and seek help from member organizations.
4. Equipment for providing remote services – Member organizations need to purchase laptops, tablets and other equipment necessary for advocacy to be provided remotely. Additional software is needed to open on-line chat options for survivors. HIPAA-compliant Zoom accounts are needed for staff to communicate with each other, as well as conduct support groups.
5. Staff Health Insurance – Several of our members have gotten estimates for increases in health insurance premiums in the range of 25%. They are hearing that this increase is as a result of COVID-19.,
6. Core Services – Member organizations' ability to raise private funding through events has been severely impacted. They report that they will be forced to lay off many members of their staff and discontinue some core services without the funding needed to support their core functions.

The estimated COVID-related costs for the Network and member organizations totals \$197,091 for the period of April 2020 through June 2020. The estimated costs, with an additional \$50,000, for the Network itself, due to increased costs for attorneys and costs related to working offsite for the period of July 2020 through December 2020 is \$444,182.

Human Trafficking Programs

The Center supports Case Manager positions in two police departments (South Burlington and Rutland). These two programs are supported using VOCA Assistance funding. They too have seen an increase in costs due to COVID-19 including hotel, food, and transportation costs. We estimate needing an additional \$10,000 to cover direct client costs from April 2020 through June 2020 and \$10,000 for July 2020 through December 2020.

Advocate Program

The Center supports Victim Advocates in the State Attorney's offices. Currently Compensation Special Funding and VOCA Assistance Funding support these 24 positions. With the reduction of deposits to the Compensation Special Fund, there will be an impact on support for this program. The Center has back filled these positions with federal funding. In the past, we saw increases over the last 4 years. Beginning last year there have been significant reductions on the federal funds, and any revenue loss from the special fund will result in reductions to the Advocate Program without additional state support. The Center estimates it will need \$396,000 for July 2020 through December 2020.

Child Advocacy Centers, Supervised Visitation Centers, Anti-Violence Grants

The Center has just been notified of a potential reduction of SGF in the amount of \$101,134. This is the 8% reduction over the course of the year. This represents all pass-through funds and goes directly to support services to victims. The Center is not sure how these reductions will be done but expect that some or all of these programs may see reductions that in prior years may have been back filled with VOCA funding that no long is possible.

The Center

The Center has some direct costs associated with doing business during the COVID-19 crisis. For the time period of April 2020 through June 2020 the additional costs for doing business were \$13,485 and represent costs to set-up home offices for five staff, increased cleaning for three buildings, and physical adaptations and office moving to ensure safer working conditions. In addition, the Center had to furlough 14 staff who were then eligible to collect unemployment. The Center pays the unemployment by direct billing on claims made. The estimated cost for nine weeks unemployment for fourteen staff is \$54,648. In addition, the Center estimates Covid-19 related costs for the time period of July 2020 through December 2020 as follows: cleaning and cleaning supplies \$4,950 and unemployment for four staff for 26 weeks of \$43,352.

Total Funding Need

Based on the calculations outlined above, \$1,153,698 is the projected need to support the efforts outlined above.