

Police Department

LOB #203:

VICTIM SERVICES SECTION

Purpose

The Victim Services Section (VSS) has a twenty year history of providing comprehensive services to victims of crime in Fairfax County, Fairfax City, Town of Herndon, Town of Vienna as well as assisting victims referred through the Virginia State Police. These services are mandated by the Virginia Crime Victim and Witness Bill of Rights (§ 19.2-11).

VSS staff are an essential component to the successful investigation and prosecution of the cases in which they are assigned. VSS provide detectives, officers, and Commonwealth Attorney's the necessary support needed to focus their efforts on the investigation and prosecution of the case while using expertise to handle the needs of those victims affected by crime. VSS work to meet the needs of victims of crime who are attempting to navigate the confusing and difficult landscape of the criminal justice system. In doing so, VSS directly supports and embodies the mission and focus of the Fairfax County Police Department in providing professional support, assistance and the highest quality of service to the citizens of Fairfax County.

Description

The Victim Services Section of the Fairfax County Police Department was created in 1986, and adopted by the County Board of Supervisors because of efforts by the League of Women Voters, the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, the Office of the Sheriff and the Police Department. The Fairfax County Police Department established the Victim Services Section within the Criminal Investigation Bureau in order to ensure the fair, compassionate, and sensitive treatment of victims and witnesses of crime. The Fairfax County Police Department guarantees that victims and witnesses of crime are treated with respect and dignity and are afforded rights and services designed to address the specifics of their victimization.

Benefits

As system-based victim advocate within a law enforcement agency, the VSS work cases starting from the onset of the crime and continue to work with victims and survivors throughout the criminal justice process. While community based advocates are specially trained in working with victims of a particular group, the Department's advocates are trained to work with victims of all crime. System-based advocates are often better able to access information but it also means the advocates offer services that are unique to their role, such as: assisting victims in scheduling appointments with criminal justice personnel (e.g., detectives, prosecutors); offering victim transportation when needed, participate in interviews and other procedures, following the case throughout the entire court process and providing court accompaniment.

The Section's purpose is to respond to the psychological, emotional, and financial needs of crime victims and witnesses in accordance with the Code of Virginia to individuals victimized within the police jurisdictions of Fairfax County, Fairfax City and the towns of Herndon and Vienna. This also includes the Virginia State Police and George Mason University. This is achieved through crisis intervention, counseling, outreach, advocacy, education, information, and referral for victims of crime and trauma, close support to first responders, investigative units, and on a larger scale, promotion and heightening of awareness for the neighborhoods and communities in which victims and witnesses of crime reside.

Police Department

Mandates

The Victim Services Section is mandated under the Federal Victim of Crime Act and the Virginia Victim and Witness Rights Act including the rights pertaining to protection, financial assistance, notifications, victim input and courtroom assistance; and assists victims with exercising those rights as required by the Code of Virginia.

Virginia Code § 19.2-368.17 – law enforcement officers must notify victims of crime their rights by distribution of notices to each victim.

Virginia Code § 19.2-11.01- Crime Victim and Witness Rights-that crime victims and witness are informed of their rights provided to them under the laws of the Commonwealth; that they receive authorized services as appropriate.

Crime Victim Services Grant: Local governments receiving victim services grants are required to establish and operate programs to provide services to victims of crime in accordance with Department of Criminal Justice Services guidelines established to implement the Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act. Localities are also required to report periodically on expenditures and on progress toward achieving the objectives of the grant.

Authority: Virginia Code §§ 9.1-104, 19.2-11.01, and 19.2-11.3; Department of Criminal Justice Services Program Guidelines; P.L. 98-473 (Victims of Crime Act) (Fed.); Final Program Guidelines, Victims of Crime Act (Fed.)

STOP Violence Against Women Grants: Local governments receiving STOP grants to establish and operate programs which combat violent crime against women through enhancement of the criminal justice response or victims services must comply with Department of Criminal Justice Services program guidelines.

Authority: Virginia Code § 9.1-102; Violence Against Women Act of 1994 and Violence Against Women Act of 2000 (Fed.); Department of Criminal Justice Services Program Guidelines.

Trends and Challenges

At present, not every case is being worked by a VSS specialist. In cases where there is a VSS specialist assigned, the advocate's time is shared with numerous other duties, which leaves many crime victims with just the basic services. In most instances, the casework produced by a single station is far too much work for one Victim Service Specialist to handle effectively. The VSS specialists already carry caseloads in the hundreds. In addition to working with victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking, the VSS is the only resource in the County that assist victims of homicide, malicious wounding, robbery, bias and hate crimes, arson, burglary, and home invasions. VSS continue to experience an increase in the number of cases referred by the investigators, Commonwealth's Attorney Office, the Towns of Herndon and Vienna, City of Fairfax, and other County agencies, as well as self-referrals. With the recent closing of Child Help in March 2012, the Victim Service Section is also the only agency in the County that provides criminal court accompaniment to victims of child physical and sexual abuse. In addition, the department has implemented the Lethality Assessment, which will increase VSS caseload not only within the department but also from the outside jurisdictions.

In April 2013 due to a recent audit, General Order 501.2 Investigative Responsibilities was updated to ensure the department was providing appropriate services to crime victims per code. GO 501.2.VI. It states *"The Department recognizes the need to address the rights and concerns of victims and witnesses in accordance with the Code of Virginia §19.2-11.1"*. It goes on to include *"as soon as practicable after identifying a victim or witness of a crime, the preliminary officer or detective shall provide the victim or witness with the Victim Services Section's trifold brochure"*. This one change in policy has significantly increased the VSS caseload but no additional staff have been added.

Police Department

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #203: Victim Services Section			
FUNDING			
<u>Expenditures:</u>			
Compensation	\$490,003	\$568,241	\$529,122
Operating Expenses	20,871	40,748	47,547
Total Expenditures	\$510,874	\$608,989	\$576,669
General Fund Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0
Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund	\$510,874	\$608,989	\$576,669
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
<u>Positions:</u>			
Regular	5 / 5	5 / 5	5 / 5
Total Positions	5 / 5	5 / 5	5 / 5

Police Department

Metrics

Metric Indicator	CY 2013 Actual	CY 2014 Actual	CY 2015 Estimate	CY 2016 Estimate	CY 2017 Estimate
Number of VSS Tri-folds Provided	3,147	3,241	3,300	3,400	3,500
Number of Victims/Witnesses Served	3,440	3,677	3,800	4,000	4,200
Number of Courtroom Accompaniment	827	983	1,300	1,400	1,500
Number of Home Visits	87	88	90	95	100
Number of Office Walk-ins	52	61	69	75	80

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VSS staff is also an essential component to the successful investigation and prosecution of the cases in which they are assigned. VSS provide detectives, officers, and Commonwealth Attorney's the necessary support needed to focus their efforts on the investigation and prosecution of the case while using expertise to handle the needs of those victims affected by crime. VSS work to meet the needs of victims of crime who are attempting to navigate the confusing and difficult landscape of the criminal justice system. In doing so, VSS directly supports and embodies the mission and focus of the Fairfax County Police Department in providing professional support, assistance and the highest quality of service to the citizens of Fairfax County.

It is difficult to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of VSS, as the goal is the victims psychological, emotional and mental well-being, a feeling of security, or the ability to continue to live one's life without fear of being victimized again. However, tasks such as cases assigned, court accompaniment, or the number of Victim Witness trifold pamphlets being distributed can be tracked for statistical analysis.

Objectives for 2015

- Victim Services Section should perform at least 90 home visits a year;
- Distribute over 3,300 Victim Rights information pamphlets to crime victims;
- Accompany over 3,800 crime victims and witnesses through the criminal justice process; and,
- Obtain additional VSS advocates to adequately provide services to crime victims in an ever increasing population as mandated in the Virginia Crime Victim and Witness Bill of Rights (Virginia Code § 19.2-11).

Grant Support

FY 2016 Grant Total Funding: Funding of \$240,484, including \$13,248 in Local Cash Match and 6/6.0 FTE grant positions supports the Victims Services LOB.

Someplace Grant - \$52,993, including \$13,248 in Local Cash Match and 1/1.0 FTE grant position

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services provides funding for critical services to victims of domestic violence in Fairfax County. There is a 25 percent Local Cash Match requirement.

Victim Witness Assistance Grant - \$187,491 and 5/5.0 FTE grant positions

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services provides funding to the Victim Witness Unit to provide critical services for victims and witnesses of criminal activity. There is no Local Cash Match associated with this grant.