Chapter 9 Filing Complaints

This chapter contains information regarding how someone can file a complaint with the Victim Assistance Section, the types of complaints appropriate to report and the processes for investigating complaints.

A complaint may involve:

a. Discrimination
b. Violation of service standards
c. Civil rights violations

Violations of contract terms, or certified assurances

Civil Rights

Civil Rights Complaint Process

All clients, customers, program participants, employees, job applicants, or consumers of The Iowa Attorney General's Office, and those of their grantees have the right to participate in programs and activities operated by the Victim Assistance Section or its grantees regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability. In addition, grantees of Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grants are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Anyone who thinks they have been discriminated against by an employee of The Iowa Attorney General's Office or a grantee of The Iowa Attorney General's Office, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or thinks they have been retaliated against by an Iowa Attorney General employee or grantee, may file a written complaint alleging such discrimination by completing the **online discrimination complaint form.** In addition, recipients or grantees of Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funds are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Complaint Process

Any employee of the Victim Assistance Section of the Iowa Attorney General's Office who receives a discrimination complaint from an employee, a job applicant, client, customer, program participant or consumer of the Victim Assistance Section or of a grantee, must forward the completed complaint form to the grant administrator, who will document the complaint and forward it to the Victim Assistance section chief.

The Victim Assistance section chief shall instruct the Victim Assistance staff regarding the next steps to take regarding the complaint.

Complainants will also be informed that they may file complaints directly with the Department of Justice:

U.S. Department of Justice

Office for Civil Rights
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice
999 N. Capitol Street, NE
Washington, DC 20531

For more information on filing a complaint see https://www.ojp.gov/program/civil-rights-office/filing-civil-rights-complaint.

Individuals who believe that they may have been victims of civil rights violations can learn how to report violations by visiting civilrights.justice.gov.

If you believe that you are a victim of criminal civil rights violations, such as misconduct by law enforcement officers, hate crimes, or human trafficking, please contact your local FBI office.

If a Federal or State court or Federal or State administrative agency makes a finding of discrimination after a due process hearing on the ground of race, religion, national origin, sex, or disability against a recipient of victim assistance formula funds The Iowa Attorney General's Office will forward a copy of the findings to the Office for Civil Rights of OJP.

Discrimination Online Complaint Form

Service Standards

Service Standards and Other Violations Complaint Process

All clients, employees, or consumers of an Iowa Attorney General's grantee may file a complaint regarding a potential violation of a victim service program's service standards, contractual stipulation and/or certified assurances by completing the **online service standards complaint form.**

Within one week of receiving a written complaint, the grant administrator or the grant coordinator assigned to the victim service program with whom the complaint is about, will notify the complainant and individual or organizations noted in the complaint, and provide them with:

1. A copy of the complaint
2. A copy of the process that will be followed
3. The Victim Assistance contact person's name (each party will have one contact person assigned to them)

Staff will also forward a copy of the complaint to the Victim Assistance section chief.

The grant administrator or grant coordinator will contact the complainant, obtain additional information if needed, and forward a blank release of information form. The grant coordinator will also contact the organization named in the complaint. The grant coordinator will obtain releases signed by the complainant in order to obtain case notes, emails, text messages or any other documentation from the organization necessary to investigate the complaint.

Once the investigation has been completed, a Victim Assistance review team (generally the grant coordinator, grant administrator and the section chief) will determine if the complaint is a violation of the victim service program service standards, contractual agreement and/or certified assurances. If a complaint does not concern a violation of victim service program standards, contractual agreement and/or certified assurance, the review committee will refer the complaint back to the victim service program or complainant to resolve.

If review team determines the complaint is alleging a violation of service standards, contractual agreement and/or certified assurances, it will gather additional information. The review team may request information from any party to the complaint including the complainant; the person(s) or organization being complained about; the board of the victim service program involved; or any other person or organization with knowledge about the circumstances of the complaint. All attempts will be made to gather this information within 60 days of receipt of the complaint.

If, during the information-gathering phase, one party requests the opportunity to address the review team in person and it is granted, all parties will be offered the chance to talk with the committee individually.

After the information is gathered, the review team will formulate the results of their review, including suggested recommendations to the victim service program if it was determined there was a violation of the program service standards, contractual agreement and/or certified assurance.

The grant team will share the results of review team's investigation with both the complainant and the individual or organization the complaint was about. If there are no findings, or recommendations for additional actions, the complaint will be closed.

If there are findings or recommended actions, both the complainant and the individual, or organization the complaint was about will be notified. The individual or organization will be given a corrective action plan with specific instructions and deadlines to remedy the violations(s). Corrective action plans could include attendance at specialized training or technical assistance or changes to organizational policies or procedures.

The grant coordinator will monitor the individual or organization for compliance with the corrective action plan and advise the grant administrator and the section chief of the progress to complete the plan. The section chief will determine what actions are to be imposed for noncompliance. Additional actions (sanctions) could include implementing additional corrective actions, temporarily withholding claim reimbursements, disallowing funding (including match) for noncompliant activities, returning grant funds, contract termination, or other remedies legally available.

All information gathered in the complaint process will be kept confidential, other than notifying the complainant of the review team's determination. If sanctions are imposed, the content of the sanction can be made available to the public.

The grant team may take immediate action if they believe actions described in the complaint will result in harm to survivors.

Service Standards Online Complaint Form

Sexual Abuse Services Program (SASP)

If a subrecipient receives Sexual Abuse Service Program **(SASP)** funds, an annual SASP report is due March 15, which reports the previous calendar year's (January to December) grant activities. The SASP annual report is completed and submitted in the required Adobe file format and uploaded in the Performance Reports component of Iowa GVS.

The SASP reporting template and reporting instructions can be found on the Attorney General's website.

Family Violence Prevention & Services Act (FVPSA)

If a subrecipient receives Family Violence Prevention & Services Act **(FVPSA)** funds, an annual FVPSA Report is due November 15, which reports the grant activities from the most recent October 1, to September 30 grant year. The FVPSA Annual Report is required to be submitted in the Performance Reports component of Iowa GVS.

The FVPSA reporting template and reporting instructions can be found on the Attorney General's website.

Bi-Annual Performance Reports (Required of All Subrecipients)

All subrecipients receiving victim assistance funds, must complete Victim Assistance bi-annual performance reports.

These programs: Domestic Abuse Comprehensive (DAC), Sexual Abuse Comprehensive (SAC), Shelter-Based Victim Services, Statewide Victim Coalition, Culturally Specific Programs (CSP), Statewide Victim Hotline or Survivor of Homicide Program are required to use the Empower Database System (Empower DB). The reporting section of Empower DB has the capability of printing the reports.

Subrecipients who are required to use Empower DB will run their bi-annual performance report in the Empower DB system and then submit them in the Performance Reports component of Iowa GVS.

Empower DB has an assortment of instructional videos illustrating data entry and how to navigate the system in the Database Documentation Section.

EmpowerDB activity definitions will be used by anyone completing required reports. This comprehensive listing of activities and their corresponding definitions is designed to assist those agencies using EmpowerDB; however, anyone can use these helpful definitions.

The biannual reporting templates are here:

Biannual Report Template #1

Biannual Report Template #2

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