

Iowa Attorney General's Office
Proposals to Improve Crime Victim Services
September 2012

1. **Introduction.** The Iowa Attorney General's Office ("Office") is proposing changes to how crime victim services are funded in Iowa. The proposals were developed jointly by the Office's Crime Victims Assistance Division ("CVAD"), the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA).
2. **Goal.** The goal of the Office, ICADV and IowaCASA in proposing these changes is to utilize available funding in a manner that most effectively provides quality services to all crime victims in Iowa.
3. **Outline of Proposals.** The proposed changes would enlarge service areas by dividing Iowa into six regions. Within the six service regions, the Office would fund one or two comprehensive Domestic Violence service and advocacy programs ("DV programs"), one or two comprehensive Sexual Assault service and advocacy programs ("SA programs"), and one or two emergency Shelter programs ("Shelter programs"). Under this model, funds will be awarded on a competitive basis to programs that will best provide specific victim services in a region. (A map of the regions is attached.)
4. **Process for Developing and Implementing Proposals.** The Office is committed to receiving comments and suggestions about the proposals before they are finalized and implemented.
 - a. **Experts.** In addition to consulting with experts from ICADV and IowaCASA, staff members from CVAD have reached out to national experts in the victim service field for advice about the proposals. CVAD has also researched initiatives being carried out by other states, notably Michigan and Minnesota.
 - b. **Local Program Directors.** In August, CVAD staff members have travelled around the state to meet with directors of the local victim service programs to discuss the proposals.
 - c. **Public Meetings.** The Office plans to hold regional public meeting in October to receive comments about the proposals from enforcement officials, victim advocates, legislators, and the general public.
 - d. **Legislature.** The proposals will be presented to the Legislature as part to the Office's annual budget presentation. This will afford legislators with the opportunity to review the proposals before the grant notification process begins in the spring.

5. **Reason for Proposals - Funding Cuts.** The Office is making these proposals because the funding for crime victim service grants is inadequate to provide quality services to all crime victims unless changes are made in the way those services are delivered. Cost savings and efficiencies must be realized by delivering services in new and better ways. Both federal and state funds have been cut for victim assistance grants. Federal funding for FY13 will be about 18% (\$1,482,794) less than federal funding in FY10. State general fund appropriations for FY13 will be about 7% (\$213,600) less than state general fund appropriations in FY10.

- a. **Transfers from the Crime Victim Compensation Fund (“Fund”).** The Office administers the Fund which is comprised of criminal fines/penalties and is used to compensate victims of serious crimes for various expenses, including medical and counseling expenses, lost wages, and funeral expenses. For FY12, the Legislature directed \$150,000 to be transferred from the Fund to victim service grants. Pursuant to permanent statutory authority, the Office transferred an additional \$350,000 from the Fund to grants for FY12. For FY13, the Legislature again directed \$150,000 from the Fund to grants. The Office has announced that it will transfer an additional \$1 million for FY13.

No decision has been made concerning future transfers. The Office will continue to evaluate the balance in the Fund and will make transfers to grants, to the extent the transfers do not endanger the solvency of the Fund, or the ability to pay claims in a timely manner. However, it is clear that transfers from the Fund are not a long-term solution to filling the budget shortfalls for grants.

- b. **Impact of Cuts.** Cuts in funding have had a very detrimental impact on victim services.
- *Previous Closures.* 8 programs have closed since FY05. Additionally, 1 program closed in FY04, 2 programs in FY03, and 5 programs closed from FY94-FY01. 2 programs have already closed outreach offices.
 - *Anticipated Closures.* 6 programs anticipate having to close outreach offices in FY13. 7 programs anticipate reducing or limiting staff time at outreach offices in FY13. As a result of these anticipated closures, 14 of 31 programs have stated victims would have to travel further for services and based on the average provided, the anticipated victims seeking services will have to travel 64 miles on average for services.
 - *Service Areas Have Become Large.* Half of CVAD-funded domestic violence and sexual assault programs currently serve 4 or more counties, including 5 programs that serve 6-8 county areas.
 - *Budget Woes.* Programs struggle to make payroll and keep shelters open.

6. **Benefits of Proposals.** The Office believes that the proposed changes will have several benefits over the current system.

- a. **Proactive Planning will Ensure Better Services.** By being proactive and getting out in front of this problem, quality services can be assured. The alternative to proposing thoughtful changes is waiting for programs to financially collapse at random.
- b. **Less Overhead/More Victim Advocates.** Re-allocation of monies to the most effective services will decrease administrative and overhead costs. This will allow the bulk of the resources to be used to pay advocates who provide direct services to victims. The result will be the retention and hiring of more advocates across the state and better quality services.
- c. **Final Plans Will Address Needs of All Victims in a Region.** Through the competitive grant application process, service plans approved will address the needs of all crime victims in a region. Approved plans will address the particular needs of both urban and rural clients. Approved plans will eventually include ideas for service provision, outreach offices, and timely response to all counties in the region.
- d. **Collaboration with Other Local Service Providers.** Approved plans will require programs to work towards surrounding victims with collaborative services throughout the community (mental health, substance abuse, education, etc.), instead of being the sole provider of all services.
- e. **Additional Services with Local Money.** The Office encourages programs to seek community support to pay for services, including community donations, local grants, foundation monies, and local governmental support. These resources may be used at the discretion of the programs to supplement services funded by the Office. For example, the Office may select a program as the region's DV program. If the program currently was providing a sexual assault support group, that sexual assault counseling could certainly continue with funding from local resources.

7. **Proposals Preferable to Current Funding of Shelters.** The focus of the Office is to utilize limited funds to effectively reach and adequately serve more victims versus allocating the majority of resources to shelters that serve a small population.

a. **Statistics.**

- *Minority of Victims Use Shelters.* Based on statistics provided by Iowa's domestic violence shelters, of the 21,866 adult domestic violence victims served in FY11, only 11.2% (2,453) utilized shelter. The remaining 88.8% of victims utilized other outreach services.
- *Use of Shelters Decreasing.* In an analysis of shelter nights from FY09-FY11, CVAD found there has been a 40% (4681:2824) decrease in clients utilizing urban shelters. In rural areas, there was a 17% (2123:1762) decrease in shelter usage during that period.
- *High Shelter Vacancy Rates.* Based on an annual point-in-time survey conduct by the Iowa Finance Authority during FY12, the average vacancy rate for domestic

violence shelter programs (with an aggregate of 462 beds available) was 42%, meaning the utilization rate was only 58%.

- *Shelters Not Always Sought in Serious Situations.* No woman who was a victim of domestic violence murder in Iowa in FY12 had sought shelter services prior to the murder.

b. **New Research on What Really Helps Victims.** In the past, the focus was on funding brick and mortar shelters which are staffed 24/7/365. (The costs to maintain a shelter are high – about \$400,000/year, on average.) The practice has been to have victims come to a shelter for 30, 60, or 90 days, with the hope that victims could change their lives in a relatively small amount of time.

A growing body of research shows that victims are better able to stay violence-free if they have longer term or, ideally, permanent housing. This requires a change in funding priorities. Instead of an emphasis on short term shelter, the focus needs to be on the victim's need for permanent housing (rent and utilities), food, education and employment.

Various types of housing models need to be considered (in addition to shelters), including rapid-rehousing, safe homes, scattered community housing, and transitional housing. Here are some descriptions of the housing options for victims:

- *Shelter.* Shelter is a temporary emergency housing solution that typically involves a communal living space with varying availability of private living space such as bedrooms. Shelter is staffed by advocates 24-hours a day who are available to provide information, referral, and support. Shelter also provides for basic food, clothing, telephone, and hygiene needs. Length of stay is typically from a few weeks to a few months, or until stable housing can be secured. Immediate safety risk, e.g. a victim is awaiting the trial of a perpetrator out on bail who has threatened to harm her, is typically the reason for shelter services.
- *Safe Homes.* Safe homes provide temporary shelter to survivors of domestic abuse within a trained volunteer's home or a motel/hotel. Safe homes may be used when in the following circumstances: shelter services are not available in the region; shelters are filled to capacity; the distance between the individual or family seeking safe shelter and the shelter facility prohibits immediate access to the facility; the individual or family seeking safe shelter has special needs best served by shelter provision through a motel/hotel placement, including the gender of the individual seeking shelter, wheelchair or other accessibility needs; safety or other circumstances.
- *Rapid Re-housing.* Rapid re-housing provides rental assistance to homeless individuals and families with up to 24 months of rental assistance. The assistance can be short-term (up to 3 months) or medium term (up to 24 months). There is broad discretion on the type, length and amount of assistance. Rental assistance programs are a voluntary option, not a required program. In order to qualify as

rapid re-housing, the homeless individual or family must have a lease with the landlord.

- *Scattered Housing.* Scattered housing refers to public housing or other types of housing that are scattered throughout a city or area. Instead of one building holding multiple low-income or homeless families, families would be relocated to different sites for their individual family.
- *Transitional Housing.* The goal of transitional housing is to help residents achieve self-sufficiency. Best practice aims to move a resident as quickly as possible into market/permanent housing. In temporary housing programs, the residents do not have a lease. Temporary housing provides up to 24 months of housing for homeless individuals and families. Residents may be asked to pay up to 30% of their income into an escrow account or help support the program.

Federal funding is becoming available for housing other than shelters, allowing programs to move in this direction away from the exclusive use of shelters.

- c. **Safety of Victims Remains Key Priority.** The safety of domestic violence victims is of paramount importance and the proposed changes will not compromise the availability of a safe haven to escape domestic violence. Shelter and emergency housing will be available.
- *Shelter(s) in Each Region.* At least one Shelter program will be available in each region.
 - *Emergency Housing.* Emergency housing at local motels, hotels, or other facilities will be part of all approved DV Programs for a region.
 - *Safety Protocols Remain in Place.* Safety planning and protocols for emergency housing will be similar to those currently followed for shelters: When a victim needs help, a call is made to the victim crisis hotline. The victim is advised to go to a safe place –usually a police station or hospital emergency room. The victim is met there by a victim advocate who works with the victim on a safety plan. Safe housing at a hotel, motel, or other facility is arranged for the victim. Transportation and other services are provided for the victim.
- d. **Model Programs in Iowa.** Several programs across Iowa have moved in new directions in providing housing for victims, which demonstrates the growing acceptance and viability of the proposals being advanced by the Office, ICADV and IowaCASA. The programs include:
- Adel, Crisis Intervention & Advocacy Center
 - Davenport, Family Resources, Inc.

- Decorah, Helping Services of Northeast Iowa (new programming)
- Des Moines, Children & Families of Iowa, Compass Project (new programming)
- Oskaloosa, Crisis Intervention Services
- Sioux Center, Family Crisis Centers of Northwest Iowa (new programming)
- Sioux City, Council on Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence
- Waverly, Cedar Valley Friends of the Family

The housing options offered by these programs vary:

- All of these programs provide rapid re-housing activities: application fees, first/last month's rent, referral support to legal aid land/lord tenant services, utility assistance, etc.
- Some of these agencies provide transitional housing programs which provide 24 months of rent at the end of which the clients have to find new housing because their name isn't on the lease.
- The Waverly and Sioux City programs have scattered housing.
- Children and Families of Iowa offers both a fixed apartment building and scattered housing rental assistance. It also has a new HOME Tenant based rental assistance program, which works just like rapid re-housing (24 months of assistance).
- The Decorah program provides scattered site apartments and rents them in the tenant's name so that it looks rapid re-housing.
- The Sioux Center program has two homes that it owns -- "House of Hope" and "House of Ruth."

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IOWA FUNDING & SERVICES MAP

