



Fiscal Services Update

Fiscal Services has continued to provide services to OVS contractors and other service providers during the pandemic. Over \$5.9 million was distributed to service providers during April and May to maintain their services to crime victims, and hospitals and multidisciplinary teams were reimbursed \$150,000 for sexual assault examinations and evidence collection. Fiscal Services staff have also assisted OVS contractors with budget concerns and have prepared all required federal funding reports during the pandemic.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2019, OVS released nine educational videos that provide information on OVS services, the criminal court process, and orders of protection.

These videos are available online at www.jud.ct.gov/crimevictim/videos.htm

Central Office Business Hours Extended

On June 15, 2020, the Office of Victim Services' (OVS) Central Office business hours will return to normal operations (Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) with 50 percent staffing capacity. Currently, Central Office staff are available Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

These extended hours of operation will allow Central Office staff additional time to assist crime victims and their families.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, OVS has continued to provide services to crime victims and their families, including processing applications for victim compensation, advocacy services, victim notification, staffing a Helpline to provide information and resources, 24/7 sexual assault forensic examination services, and assistance to OVS contracted victim service providers.

OVS Provides Services to Victims During Pandemic

On March 17, 2020, the Connecticut Judicial Branch implemented social distancing protocols as a strategic effort to minimize possible exposure to COVID-19. These protocols included reducing staffing levels, closing certain courthouses, and reducing the hours of operation at the open courthouses and administrative offices.

Although, OVS has continued to offer services and assist crime victims and their

Victim Compensation

March 17 to May 31, 2020

- 127 new victim compensation applications received;
- Determinations were issued on 132 victim compensation applications; and
- More than \$124,000 in victim compensation was paid on 93 applications.

families, OVS programs have experienced service delivery limitations or delays as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Victim Compensation

During the pandemic, the Victim Compensation Program has provided vital and essential financial reimbursement to crime victims and their families' for certain expenses and losses caused by crime.

During March 17, 2020, to May 31, 2020, 127 victim applications were received, 132 determinations were issued, and more than \$124,000 was paid on 93 claims for victim compensation. This work was achieved with a significant reduction in staff. On March 17, the Victim Compensation Program staffing level was reduced to 25 percent.

"I am amazed and proud of the amount of work the staff were able to and continue to accomplish," said Victim Services Supervisor Rachel McKnight, who oversees the Program.

Besides the challenge of operating the program with reduced staff, an additional challenge was the inability to obtain information

OVS Developing Remote Trainings

An important service interruption of COVID-19 has been the temporary discontinuation of trainings to a variety of audiences on victims' rights, services, and responses.

The Training and Outreach Unit is researching methods to bring those trainings to a virtual environment. This Unit is also working with the SAFE Program to address trainings provided to health care professionals that have also ceased as a result of the pandemic.

Contact Us

Victim Compensation
Telephone: 860-263-2761
Toll-free: 888-286-7347
Fax: 860-263-2778
Email:
OVSCompensation@jud.ct.gov

Grants and Contracts
Telephone: 860-263-2760
Fax: 860-263-2777
Email:
James.Morgan@jud.ct.gov

Helpline
Toll-free: 800-822-8428
Fax: 860-263-2777
Email: OVS@jud.ct.gov

Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) Program
Telephone: 860-263-2760
Fax: 860-263-2777
Email:
Denise.Covington@jud.ct.gov

Training and Outreach
Telephone: 860-263-2760
Fax: 860-263-2777
Email: OVSTraining@jud.ct.gov

Victim Services
Telephone: 860-263-2760
Fax: 860-263-2777
Email: Mary.Kozicki@jud.ct.gov
or Koren.ButlerKurth@jud.ct.gov

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Victim Compensation

necessary to process claims from service providers, employers, and others who were required to cease business operations during the pandemic.

"This inability to obtain necessary information coupled with reduced staffing resulted in a 62 percent decrease in the processing of applications compared to this time period in 2019," McKnight said.

Victim Services

The Victim Services Program provides advocacy, notification, referrals, and information to crime victims and their family members as they navigate the criminal, juvenile, and civil justice systems.

The OVS Helpline and Victim Notification Programs have been fully functional on the days of operation, and as such, victims have been able to exercise their rights within the framework of the current COVID-19 environment. Victims have received information on the criminal justice system, orders of protection, the status of court cases, and the custody status of inmates held in the Department of Correction custody.

OVS has two victim services advocates assigned to the Board of Pardons and Paroles, as well as court-based victim services advocates assigned to courthouses throughout the state. During the pandemic, all of OVS victim services advocates have been and continue to be available by email and through the OVS Helpline.

Victims Services Supervisors Mary Kozicki and Koren Butler-Kurth said the work of the victim services advocates have been outstanding and that advocates will continue to provide compassionate services to victims to ensure victims' rights to information, notification, return of property, and protection from the accused, and most importantly that victims are visible and their voices heard.

Helpline

March 17 to May 31, 2020

- 604 victims, professionals, or other individuals were assisted; and
- More than 1,700 services were provided, including safety planning, information on victims' rights, and referrals to community and state-based agencies.

SAFE Program

The Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) Program provides compassionate, patient-centered sexual assault forensic examination services to sexual assault victims, 13 years or older, who present at a participating health care facility. Currently, the Judicial Branch has formal agreements with nine health care facilities in the Hartford, Middlesex, New Haven, and Windham counties to serve as SAFE sites.

The SAFE Program has continued to respond 24/7 to victims of sexual assault at these participating health care facilities, except at the University of Connecticut (UCONN), Student Health Services, as the UCONN campus closed during the pandemic.

Program Manager Denise Covington, who manages the SAFE Program, said that approximately one-half of the nurses serving as SAFEs were unable to be on the schedule as they were caring for COVID-19 patients, either through reassignment to clinical areas within the hospitals where they work or deployment to other hospitals.

"In spite of the decreased staffing, 98 percent of coverage needs were met," said Covington.

Between April 1 to May 31, 2020, the SAFE Program provided SAFE services to 17 victims of sexual assault, Covington said.