

MINUTES
Connecticut Advisory Council for Victims of Crime
May 15, 2007

The Connecticut Advisory Council for Victims of Crime met at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, in the fourth floor conference room on Tuesday, May 15, 2007 from 2:06 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

Members in Attendance:

Co-chair Steve Eppler-Epstein, Cheryl Burack, Joseph Bibisi, Larry Bostrom, Chester Brodnicki, Janice Heggie Margolis, Lisa Holden, Laura Cordes for Nancy Kushins, Kevin Lawlor, and Jan VanTassel

Members Excused or Absent:

Judge Patrick L. Carroll, Fernando Betancourt, Larry D'Orsi, John Duffey, and Neil O'Leary

OVS Staff Present:

Linda J. Cimino, Jamey L. Harris, David Burr, James Morgan, and Brenda Jordan

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Steve Eppler-Epstein welcomed members and called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m. Members introduced themselves to Laura Cordes, who represented Nancy Kushins.

2. Review and Approval of the March 20, 2007 Meeting Minutes

Steve asked for a motion to accept the minutes of March 20, 2007, as presented. The motion was moved and seconded, and the minutes were accepted as presented with abstentions from Lisa Holden, Jan Van Tassel, and Laura Cordes.

3. Follow-up Discussion Regarding Speaker at March Meeting

Steve inquired if Council members had any comments on the concerns brought by a public speaker at the last Council meeting. Members had no remarks. Steve sought members' opinions as to how the Council should proceed with requests for public speaking, more specifically, is the Council required to allow public attendees to speak?

Linda Cimino responded that the Council is not required to allow the public to speak, however, the Council may amend the agenda by a two-thirds vote to allow a person to speak.

Steve remarked that the current layout of the meeting room (U shape with chairs available at the end of the room for public attendees) is a comfortable arrangement for public attendees and the Council.

4. Update – OVS Compensation Program Issues

Linda distributed an updated illustration of the financial position of the Program (page seventeen of the *Call to Action: Crisis in Compensation* report) as of April 30, 2007, which she reviewed with Council members. Linda expressed concern about the increase in total expenditures (\$2,208,719), the monies yet to be disbursed

(\$218,080), the amount awaiting determination (\$585,660), and the year to date obligations in excess of budget of \$1,049,268. She added that the award letters were revised to include the length of time to receive payment and gave kudos to James Morgan and Arlene Sargent for their budget plan and diligence that resulted in decreasing unpaid expenses since March 31, 2007, by \$51,576.

Presentation on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund (CICF)

Linda informed Council members that Raised Bill 7234 – An Act Concerning Victim Services passed the Judiciary Committee (File 538) but was not voted out of Appropriations. The Judiciary Committee recommended a significant change to the bill removing the following line in Section 54-215 of the General Statutes: “Amounts in the fund may be expended only pursuant to appropriation by the General Assembly.” Linda stated that had this passed, OVS would have been closer to managing the CICF, without the General Assembly setting the biennial budget.

Linda stated that unfortunately the provision was in a larger bill that would have allowed communication between the Department of Correction, Board of Pardons and Parole, and OVS and the costs associated with serving certain orders of protection.

Linda informed Council members that on May 17, 2007, she will meet with Chief Court Administrator William J. Lavery, Deputy Chief Court Administrator Barbara J. Quinn, Executive Director of Superior Court Operations Joseph D’Alesio, and others to discuss the fiscal situation of the Compensation Fund and to seek authorization to allow OVS to implement compensation benefit reductions as recommended in September 2006.

Linda explained that Compensation benefits are markedly different in other states. Linda provided a brief comparison, by crime victim type, of benefits paid by OVS and other compensation programs. This comparison revealed certain crime victim populations who do not access the benefits available, as in other states.

Kevin Lawlor inquired what benefits would be reduced and where the monies would be applied. Linda responded that the benefit realignment would reduce economic benefits, assist in the reduction of the deficit, and enable OVS to address underserved populations.

Kevin remarked that at the last Council meeting he had requested the financial position of the CICF to discern if there is enough money coming into the Fund to cover expenditures. Linda responded that currently there is \$5.8 million in the Fund and collections have increased by \$400,000 since last year. Jim Morgan added that collections through April 30, 2007, equal \$2.48 million and collections have already exceeded what would have paid out of the Fund for this year by \$400,000. Anything that is collected in May and June would be an additional surplus.

Steve suggested an analysis of crime statistics in comparison to compensation statistics as a useful tool in identifying gaps.

Cheryl Burack stated that reducing benefits will not address the underserved populations and believes that the Council should promote and preserve victims’ rights. Cheryl added that the financial crisis should be addressed legislatively.

Linda responded that OVS has been proposing legislation for the last four years and reducing benefits would enable a more balanced program. For example, from October 1, 2006 to April 30, 2007, forty applications were received on survivor benefit claims with an expected obligation of one million dollars.

Members continued to discuss concerns of reducing benefits and other measures to eliminate the financial crisis. The measures discussed included:

- Seeking appropriation each fiscal year to eliminate the previous year's deficit
- Meet with the Appropriations Committee
- An opinion editorial

Jan VanTassel remarked that there are two issues faced by the Program: budgetary and programmatic. Jan stated the Council's role regarding the financial situation is unclear, but suggested that the Council has a responsibility to make sure someone is aware of the matter. She inquired if the Council has input on the proposed program changes.

Members continued to discuss the Council's role. Joe Bibisi suggested reviewing the enabling legislation that created the Council. Linda read an excerpt from the current statute: "The council shall recommend to the Office of Victim Services program, legislative or other matters which would improve services to victims of crime and develop and coordinate needs assessments for both court-based and community-based victim services."

Chet Brodnicki suggested and moved to accept a proposal that Steve Eppler-Epstein, Linda Cimino, Stephen Ment, and the secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, Robert Genuario, meet to discuss removing the CICF from the state budget cap. Jan and Kevin seconded the motion.

Steve remarked that the conversation should involve removing the CICF from the budget cap and putting funds into the budget but not the proposed reduction of benefits. Kevin agreed stating that the reduction of benefits would be a consequence of not removing CICF from the cap and increasing the annual allocation.

Members agreed to amend the motion to include other parties in the conversation as deemed appropriate by Stephen Ment. Laura Cordes and Joe abstained from voting.

5. Discussion – Crisis Response in Light of Virginia Tech Shootings

In the interest of time, Steve suggested moving this item to the July meeting agenda. Members agreed.

6. OVS Update 2007

Linda distributed an email received from Steve Derene seeking the assistance of victim advocacy organizations to join the Congressional Crime Victim's Rights Caucus and to provide suggestions to target potential Congressional members.

Linda announced that the vacant victim services advocate position at the Waterbury GA has been filled. She also stated that OVS hosted a subcontractor meeting to elicit input on the RFP and contracting documents. Chet Brodnicki stated that as a provider, he greatly appreciated the meeting and that OVS staff were receptive to comments and feedback.

Linda informed Council members that she attended a Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification (SAVIN) conference in Virginia.

Jamey Harris reported that OVS is sponsoring an Advanced Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy training at no cost to participants in June. Seating is limited to fifty attendees and thirty-six are currently registered. Jamey invited members whose staff might be interested in attending to register at www.jud.ct.gov/crimevictim/.

Jamey also reported that the final draft of the Strategic Plan would be available for the Council to review at the July meeting.

Jim Morgan reported the October 2006 VOCA assistance grant was received. The allocation will be \$4,498,000, which is a decrease of \$339,000 from the year before.

7. Update 2007 Legislative Initiative

Steve inquired if members had legislation to report. Linda responded that a piece of proposed legislation, File 759, An Act Concerning the Prevention and Response to Trafficking in Persons, directs and appropriates \$100,000 to OVS to contract with non-governmental agencies to develop curriculum and training and education materials to assist victims of trafficking.

8. New Business

Chet Brodnicki stated that he appreciated that Linda had brought the difficult issues faced by the Compensation Program to the Council.

Steve called for a motion to adjourn the meeting; the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Brenda Jordan, Recorder