



City Council Report

Date: October 2, 2023
To: City Council
Through: Christopher J. Brady, City Manager
From: Jim Smith, City Attorney
Paul Hawkins, City Prosecutor
Subject: Federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Federal Grant awarded by the Arizona Department of Public Safety to Mesa in the amount of \$510,012 (Citywide)

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this report is to notify the Council of a grant awarded to the City of Mesa and to request approval of a resolution authorizing its acceptance.

The requested resolution will authorize the City Manager to enter into a contract on behalf of the City with the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) to receive federal funding through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Victim Assistance Grant Program totaling \$510,012 over a one-year period for FY 2024. VOCA grant funds will support 50% of the total victim services program costs for the City of Mesa Prosecutor's Office Victim Services Unit. Program costs include salary and ERE for 11 victim services staff (including 6 Victim Services Assistants, 1 Senior Victim Services Assistant, and 4 Victim Notification Clerks). Funding will also be used to support 1 temporary Victim Services Assistant, as well as membership to the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, which provides comprehensive resources and training for our Victim Services Staff.

Approval of this award, and any amendments thereto, is recommended as the funding will allow the Victim Services Program to continue to provide vital safety services assistance to Mesa crime victims. .

Background

Since 1984, the Department of Public Safety (DPS), through the VOCA Victim Assistance Grant Program, has provided federal funding for victim services programs throughout the United States. Historically, the Victim Services Unit (VSU) at the Mesa City Prosecutor's Office has been largely funded by the VOCA grant and previously received \$510,012 in

grant funding for fiscal year (FY) 2023. Although FY 2024 grant funds are being renewed at last year's amount, our program costs have risen significantly over the past 3 years due to inflation and increases in staff salary. Consequently, fiscal year 2024 VOCA grant funding will cover approximately 50% of total program costs.

Discussion

The Mesa Prosecutor's Office is responsible for prosecuting all misdemeanor crimes and city code violations within the city limits. Our Victim Services Unit (VSU) provides advocacy services to thousands of victims every year.

When a Mesa resident is victimized, most are unaware they have victims' rights and know very little about the criminal justice system or court procedures. Many victims have never been in a courtroom or a prosecutor's office, nor have they dealt with any type of criminal matter. Navigating the justice system can be confusing, disorienting and discouraging. Without the guidance, advocacy, and support offered by Victim Services, some crime victims in Mesa may never fully exercise their victims' rights or participate in the justice system in a meaningful way.

In FY 2022, we served a total of 14,350 victims (a 54% increase from FY 2022). As the City of Mesa continues to grow, the number of victims in need of services will grow with it. The funds provided by this grant will help the Victim Services Unit continue to provide critical services to victims, supporting them through the criminal justice process, ensuring they have full knowledge of and access to their Victims' Rights, and assisting them in attaining full restoration after victimization by addressing safety, healing, and economic needs.

Alternatives

The alternative to approving acceptance of the VOCA grant award funding is to deny it. Such action would require the Prosecutor's Office to request the City provide additional funding from the City's general fund to support the VSU, or it would require our office to drastically decrease VSU staff, nearly eliminating all advocacy and safety services to crime victims in our community. Approving the grant would maintain the current levels of staffing, ensuring that crime victims in Mesa continue to receive needed services in a timely manner.

Fiscal Impact

There is no change to the fiscal impact to the City in accepting the VOCA grant award funding. All required matching funds are covered by existing positions currently funded by the City of Mesa, state grants, and in-kind services. It is always a concern, particularly where staff positions are involved, whether grant funding will be maintained by the funding source. The Mesa Prosecutor's Office VSU has received funding for victim services positions consistently for over 20 years.

Coordinated With

Our Victim Services Program staff work collaboratively across departments within the City of Mesa to ensure victims have access to quality resources and services and to provide continuity of services from the moment a crime has occurred through case disposition and beyond. We work closely with the Mesa Police Department, Mesa Family Advocacy Center, and Mesa Municipal court to serve ongoing victim needs and address safety and accountability issues within the community.