



City Council Report

Date: February 5, 2018
To: City Council
Through: John Pombier, Assistant City Manager
From: Jim Smith, City Attorney
John L. Belatti, City Prosecutor
Subject: Resolution authorizing the City Manager to receive a federal VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) grant award in the amount of \$1,335,284. The three-year project period is 10/1/2017 through 09/30/2020. Citywide

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this report is to notify the Council of a grant award and to request 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 to receive federal funding through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) totaling \$1,335,284 for a three-year period. The funding would primarily be used to maintain current staff (7 positions) in the Victim Services Unit (VSU) of the Mesa Prosecutor's Office, thereby continuing to improve and offer greater services and protections to crime victims in Mesa. The funds would also be used for a new supervisor position, which will provide direct services to crime victims and supervision over mandated victim notification services and staff. The funds include computer and desk equipment for the new staff member, a color printer replacement, 2 scanner replacements, professional translation services, mileage reimbursement, training cost and associated travel, membership fees, printing costs, and funds for emergency assistance for crime victims. It is recommended to approve this resolution, as the funding will provide continued and increased services for crime victims for each of the courtrooms in the Mesa Municipal Court, and will support mandated notification services and other services offered to Mesa crime victims.

Background

Since 1984, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) has provided federal funding for victim services programs throughout the United States. Historically, the Mesa Prosecutor's Office Victim Services Unit (VSU) has used VOCA compensation grants to fund two Victim Services Assistant (VSA) positions. In 2015 the annual amount of VOCA compensation funding made available to the states increased from \$725 million to \$2.361 billion. Arizona's share of VOCA compensation grant funding increased from \$9.3 million to \$41 million. The Mesa City Prosecutor's office was awarded \$334,944 in FY2015/2016 to fund five Victim Services Assistants, one Victim Notification Clerk, equipment and training in order to provide victim assistance for each of the

courtrooms and increased services. For federal (Oct-Sept) fiscal year 2016/2017, DPS notified the Mesa Prosecutor's Office that it has renewed the award in the amount of \$321,861 to continue the funding for the increased services and VSU staff.

As an example of increased services over the last two years, in FY2014/2015 the two VOCA funded VSU staff provided 358 court-related escorts to crime victims. In this most recent completed FY2016/2017, VSU provided 761 court-related escorts; an increase of 47%.

Discussion

Mesa is the third largest city in Arizona with a population of nearly 500,000. In FY14/15 the VSU provided 14,484 mail notifications, 8,558 services and added 1,937 new crime victims. In FY15/16 the VSU provided 16,652 mail notifications, 13,991 services, and added 2,569 new crime victims to cases. The number of new victims increased by 25%; mail notifications increased by 22%; and services provided increased by 40%. The significant increases in services and notifications are due to the additional staff made available through the VOCA grant funds. The increase in Victim Services Assistants from two to five, allowed for adequate coverage for a Victim Services Assistant to be assigned to and provide services to crime victims in each of the trial court rooms and the arraignment court room. The additional Victim Notification Clerk funded by VOCA made it possible to handle the increase in the number of victims and allowed time for process improvements and additional services.

The Mesa Prosecutor's Office VSU now has a collaborative "team" for each of the courtrooms comprised of prosecutors, a legal support staff and a Victim Services Assistant (VSA), thereby allowing crime victims to be served at every stage in the criminal justice process. The new supervisory VSA will be available to assist in the specialty courts. The addition of a notification clerk not only ensures that proper written mandated notifications are sent to crime victims, but also improved processes and enhanced services to victims. Even more importantly, VSU can provide increased assistance to crime victims who are seeking a court order of protection or injunctions against harassment. Previously, VSU only provided assistance with about 1% of the victims coming to court seeking a protective order.

Alternatives

The alternative to approving acceptance of the renewed VOCA grant funding is to deny it. Such action would cause a dramatic decrease in VSU staff. Of the current eight VSU staff employees, four (4) of them are funded in whole and three (3) in part by the VOCA grant. Approving the grant would maintain the current levels of staffing and provide additional needed supervision to support the increase in staff who all provide services and notifications to crime victims by the Mesa Prosecutor's Office.

Fiscal Impact

There is no change to the fiscal impact to the City in accepting the VOCA grant funding. All required matching funds are covered by existing positions currently funded by the City of Mesa and 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 16 years. The DPS VOCA grant award project period now covers a three-year period and administrators have also relayed confidence that funding will remain available to maintain positions.

Coordinated With

Staff has communicated with both the Mesa City Court and Mesa Police Department concerning this compensation grant award. Both departments support acceptance of the grant award.