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STATE COMPTROLLER



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STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE STATE  
COMPTROLLER

May 24, 1999

Ms. Joan A. Cusack  
Chairwoman  
Crime Victims Board  
845 Central Avenue, Room 107  
Albany, N.Y. 12206-8727

Re: Victim and Witness Assistance Program Grant  
Award Process  
Report 99-Q-1

Dear Ms. Cusack:

In response to your December 11, 1998 request for assistance, we have performed a Quick Response Audit of the Victim and Witness Assistance Program's grant award process covering the period January 1, 1997 through March 26, 1999. These grant awards, made by the NYS Crime Victims Board (Board), total more than \$20 million per year, and are meant to fund community-based programs through local providers which offer free services to victims of violent crimes. As detailed in our engagement letter dated February 5, 1999, the objective of our limited scope audit was to determine whether the current grant award process can be enhanced to further incorporate statewide needs in the Board's criteria for award, and to determine whether there are alternative methodologies that can be used to incorporate additional independent crime victim data to assist the Board in allocating funding for crime victims services through its grant award process.

We conducted our audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. To accomplish our objectives, we interviewed key officials, reviewed the current grant award process, and attempted to identify crime victim needs data and independent sources of reported and unreported crime. We then used analytical procedures to evaluate the distribution of grants made.

We tested 10 current grant awards to determine the extent to which crime victim needs documentation was submitted by the provider, the extent that this supplied information was verified by the Board and whether any comparisons or other analytical techniques were used by the Board in the grant award decision making process. To identify additional independent crime

victim data, we spoke with officials from the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), the Department of Health (DOH), the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, and the NYS Coalition Against Domestic Violence. We also conducted research to identify crime statistics and information related to crime victims needs.

## **A. Audit Results**

In general, the Board does a good job of awarding funds to local providers. We found that the Board's current grant award process uses analytical tools including DCJS total reported crime statistics in conjunction with an assessment of geographical coverage by providers to assure statewide coverage of services. In addition, the Board requires providers to conduct local crime victim needs assessments. The Board may be able to enhance the grant award process by summarizing and incorporating local needs data, as well as incorporating statewide needs information, into their funding decisions. The Board might also consider collecting certain additional data and incorporating it into the Victim and Witness Assistance Program grant award process. Examples of opportunities to use additional data follow:

### **1. Reported Crime Statistics**

Reported crime by county is an indicator of the prevalence of crime and the number of crime victims within the State. Several State agencies accumulate data on crimes and crime victims, including DCJS, DOH, and OCFS. DCJS maintains the State's crime database and administers the Violence Against Women Act. DOH administers the Rape Crisis program, and OCFS licenses shelters for victims of domestic violence and operates the State's Child Abuse hotline. Both DOH and OCFS maintain data on the number of victims served in each county. In addition, the Coalition Against Domestic Violence operates a domestic violence hotline and maintains data on the number of calls handled by county.

The Board's current allocation process has produced a reasonable distribution of funds to those communities throughout the State in need of victim assistance services. In awarding grants to providers, Board officials must consider all appropriate indicators of need. To determine whether the award process would be enhanced if some additional indicators of need were formally analyzed by the Board, we performed two such analyses and compared the results of our analyses to the actual grant awards for the 1997-98 fiscal year. The two indicators of need that we analyzed were (1) the number of violent crimes in each county and (2) the number of violent crime victims served by Board-funded programs in each county. To conduct the first analysis, we used data maintained by DCJS (which the Board currently uses), plus additional data from DOH, OCFS and the Coalition Against Domestic Violence. To conduct the second analysis, we used data reported to the Board by its providers. We did not verify the accuracy of this data.

When we compared the number of reported violent crimes in each county to the amount of funds awarded to providers in that county, we found that, for most counties, the amount of funding was generally commensurate with the number of reported crimes. That is, the

counties with more reported crimes generally received more funding, and each county's share of the total funding for a particular type of crime was usually consistent with its share of the total number of incidents reported statewide for that type of crime. However, the analysis also indicates that, in a few counties, the amount of funding received was not commensurate with the number of reported crimes. In those counties, the needs of each type of crime victims might be better addressed if the extent of each particular type of crime in that county was taken into consideration by the Board during the grant award process.

We had the same results when we compared the number of violent crime victims served in each county to the amount of funds awarded to providers in that county. For most counties, the amount of funding received was generally commensurate with the number of reported crime victims served in the county; in some counties, however, the amount of funding received was not commensurate with the number of reported crime victims served in the county. We believe that this type of analysis, like the prior type of analysis, could enhance the Board's grant award process by identifying where adjustments might be needed in prospective grant awards. We believe such enhancements would be particularly timely in view of the Board's expected increase in Federal funding. In enhancing its process, the Board should not be confined to the types of analyses that we used illustratively, but should apply additional analyses that help ensure that funds are allocated in accordance with need.

## 2. Unreported Crime Data

Through discussions with knowledgeable officials from DCJS, DOH, OCFS, the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, and the Coalition for Domestic Violence, and a review of research, we noted that a significant amount of violent crime may not be reported to the police. In addition, some crimes such as rape may have lower rates of reporting. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice believes that while about 44 percent of violent crimes are reported, only 31 percent of rapes are reported. Board officials told us they have tried to obtain historical data on unreported crime for inclusion into their awards process, but had not been able to. We also conducted research to locate this information and were unable to obtain readily available and detailed information on unreported crime. However, we were able to identify some ideas which may provide the Board with a means to collect or estimate this data.

The Federal government annually conducts surveys to measure the prevalence of crime, including unreported crime. For example, in 1997 the U.S. Department of Justice conducted a nationwide survey of 43,000 households to obtain data on reported and unreported crime. The Board may want to contact the U.S. Department of Justice and determine whether it can use survey data obtained from New York State households. The Board may also consider working with the U.S. Department of Justice to obtain additional data in the future, such as county of residence.

In addition, the Board requires its providers to maintain data on the victims served. We were told that these providers determine whether or not the victims served reported their

crimes to the police. While the providers report to the Board on a quarterly basis concerning the number of victims served by type of crime, they do not report on the number of victims that did not notify the police. The Board may want to consider having providers include this information in their quarterly reports so that it can be summarized by location. The Board should periodically verify the reliability of this information and consider using it when awarding grants. Knowing the extent of unreported crime may further assist the Board in prioritizing which types of services should receive the most funding.

### 3. Data from Contracted Providers

The Board uses the quarterly reports from contracted providers to monitor whether or not providers are meeting their victim service goals. However, these reports do not reflect the extent to which there may be victims the providers are unable to serve due to inadequate resources. The Board may also want to determine from its providers whether victims are being put on waiting lists when services are not available or whether victims are being turned away. This data may be an indicator of unmet need and may warrant further investigation by the Board in its funding decisions.

### 4. Statewide Needs Assessment

The Board may want to consider conducting a statewide needs assessment to periodically identify the specific needs of victims and to determine whether those needs are being met by service providers other than those they funded. This process could include identifying not only the number of victims within each county, but also the capacity of various services at each county, and all of the additional funding sources outside the Board. During a recent audit at the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, we noted that its Homeless Housing Assistance Program is mandated to perform a statewide needs assessment as a basis for distributing funds. We also learned from our research that the states of Pennsylvania and Virginia have recently conducted needs assessments specific to their crime victims programs.

Officials from the Board, DCJS, DOH, and OCFS each expressed a desire to assemble a statewide database of all crime victims, funding and services available. A workgroup is currently in place consisting of several agencies to address this and other crime victim issues. We encourage these agencies to continue efforts on developing a statewide crime victims services and funding database. We also provided the Board with a needs assessment tool identified through our Internet research for their consideration.

## **B. Suggestions for Enhancing the Grant Award Process**

In summary, to further enhance the grant award process, the Board may want to consider:

- obtaining and analyzing additional indicators of need, and incorporating the results into the grant award decision making process;

- contacting the U.S. Department of Justice to obtain data on unreported crime for New York State households;
- asking providers to report data on the percentages of victims that do not report their crime to law enforcement agencies;
- obtaining and evaluating data from providers by crime type for the number of victims served and the number of victims on waiting lists; and
- conducting a statewide needs assessment, in conjunction with other appropriate agencies, to assemble a database of victims, services and funding sources at each county within the State.

Board officials agreed with the observations and suggestions in this report. Their response to a draft of this report is included as Appendix A.

Major contributors to this report were Frank Russo, Jack Dougherty, Brian Lotz, Christopher Bielawski, Dianne Hart, David Amedio, Mellissa Little and Mark Ren.

We look forward to hearing from you within 90 days after final release of this report concerning the disposition of our suggestions, pursuant to Section 170 of the Executive Law. We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies extended to our auditors during this review.

Very truly yours,

William P. Challice  
Audit Director

cc: Charles Conaway  
Anne Marie Strano



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May 15, 1999

William P. Challice  
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RE: Report 99-Q-1

Dear Mr. Challice:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations contained in the aforementioned audit report.

The recommendations for enhancing the grant award process provide some new information and observations to assist the Board in ensuring grant awards are appropriately distributed to under- and un-served areas of the State. The Board will pay particular attention in the next award process to comparing the number of violent crime victims served and reported crime incidents with the amount of funding received to ensure that funding is commensurate.

We will work towards identifying other indicators of need through the various Federal and state resources available as identified in your report. Specifically, the Board will pursue obtaining additional information at the Federal level from the annual U.S. Department of Justice unreported crime household survey. We will request that portion of the survey representing New York State households. We will also explore with the U.S. Department of Justice the ability to obtain this data in the future on a county level.

The report suggests expanding the current reporting requirements of grant recipients. This would include the number and percentages of victims served who do not report to a criminal justice agency and the number of victims on waiting lists for services. These suggestions will be implemented when the Board revises the current reporting document for all funded programs during the next year. This information will be useful in further documenting the need for services in various regions.

 PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Mr. William Challice  
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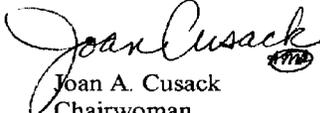
May 15, 1999

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A statewide needs assessment to identify the needs of victims and how they are meeting those needs would indeed provide an exhaustive tool for all State agencies serving crime victims to ensure comprehensive services statewide. The resources to accomplish this task are not readily identifiable. The Board will continue efforts to meet with the other State agencies to continue developing statewide crime victims' services and funding database.

I thank your staff for the courteous and professional manner in which they conducted the audit. The suggestions and resources identified will be useful as we prepare for our next request for proposals in the upcoming year.

Sincerely,

  
Joan A. Cusack  
Chairwoman