

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA



Agenda Date:	November 20, 2023
Action Required:	Appropriation
Presenter:	Pat O'Donnell, Director, Victim Witness Assistance Program
Staff Contacts:	Krisy Hammill, Director of Budget
Title:	<b>Resolution to appropriate Victim Witness Assistance Program Grant - \$258,342 (2nd reading)</b>

### **Background**

The City of Charlottesville, through the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, has received the Victim Witness Program Grant from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services in the amount of \$141,135 in Federal Funds and \$67,207 in State Special Funds, and \$50,000 supplement from the Commonwealth Attorney's operating budget for a total award of \$258,342.

### **Discussion**

The victim's rights movement began in the 1970s as a result of victims being re-victimized by the criminal justice process. Victims had difficulty navigating the complexities of the criminal justice system and no voice or recourse when their cases were continued or pled out without their knowledge or consent. Prosecutors did not have the time or skills to respond to victims who were traumatized but knew that to proceed with their case, many victims would need more services than the prosecutor's office could provide. In response to this need, the federal Victims of Crime Act was passed in 1984 and funds became available through the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice to respond to the needs of victims. The Charlottesville Victim/Witness Assistance Program was established in 1989 and has been meeting the needs of Charlottesville crime victims ever since. The Program is one of more than 60 such programs in the state that provides crisis intervention and advocacy, information, and support during and after criminal justice proceedings, access to compensation and restitution, referrals to local community agencies and ensures victims are afforded their rights as outlined in Virginia's Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act. The Program also provides training on victim issues to law enforcement and allied agencies. It regularly serves more than 1,000 victims and 20 witnesses each year.

### **Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan**

Approval of this agenda item aligns directly with Council's strategic outcome of public safety. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the total economic loss to crime victims was \$1.19 billion for violent offenses and \$16.2 billion for property crime in 2008. Statistics vary on the number of intangible losses victims accumulate, such as the effects of the crime on their sense of security, mental health, and relationships. The Charlottesville Victim Witness Assistance Program contributes to the health of the community by connecting crime victims with medical and mental

health providers through the Criminal Injury Compensation Fund. The Program helps achieve the Council's commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion by responding to the needs of crime victims by ensuring their rights are recognized throughout the local criminal justice system, including Police, Prosecution, Judges, and Probation.

### **Community Engagement**

The Victim Witness Assistance Program is engaged daily with victims of crime who access services through referrals from police, court services, social services, and other allied agencies. Program staff contacts crime victims within 48 hours of their reported victimization. For FY23 Program staff provided services to more than 1,000 individuals. Staff members serve on several coordinating councils, such as the Multi-Disciplinary Team on Child Abuse, the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, the Sexual Assault Response Team, the Monticello Area Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, Charlottesville/Albemarle Human Trafficking Task Force, and the Charlottesville/Albemarle Evidence Based Decision Making Policy Team. The program regularly provides outreach in the form of government services day, training and speaking engagements at UVA, PVCC, and other allied agencies as requested.

### **Budgetary Impact**

There is no impact to the General Fund. The City's contribution of \$50,000 was previously appropriated as part of the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office FY2024 Adopted Budget. The Victim Witness Assistance Program Grant is renewed annually, and the funds will be received and expensed in the grants fund.

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommend approval and appropriation of grant funds.

### **Alternatives**

If grant funds are not appropriated, Charlottesville crime victims will have no access to compensation, advocacy or services afforded to them under Virginia's Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act.

### **Attachments**

1. Resolution\_Victim Witness Assistance Grant Appropriation- FY 24