

**Center for Crime Victim Services
Board Meeting Minutes
January 8, 2024**

Board Members Present: Bob Paolini, Richard Katzman, Susan Ide, Susan Carr, Alycia Post.

Staff Members Present: Jennifer Poehlmann, Carol Morgan, Jodie Bacon, Maria Gibbs, Anna Harrington, Michelle Pelletier, Carol Brochu, Melinda Meyer. **Also Present:** Kate Brayton and Amy Farr, VT State Police Victim Services.

The meeting was called to order at 1:35 PM.

COMPENSATION DISCUSSION RE: “GO FUND ME” ACCOUNTS OF CRIME VICTIMS

Carol Morgan, with input from Kate Brayton and Amy Farr of the Vermont State Police office of Victim Services, advised the Board on challenges and inconsistencies that have come up over the years regarding “Go Fund Me” accounts set up on behalf of crime victims. They recommended removing the requirement that such accounts be considered a “collateral resource” for victims’ compensation claims: with the stipulation that if waiving the requirement impacts the fiscal health of the Compensation Fund in the future, the requirement may be reinstated. Richard Katzman motioned to approve removing the requirement that “Go Fund Me” accounts be considered a collateral resource. Alycia Post seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

REVIEW MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Board reviewed the meeting minutes of December 11, 2023 and unanimously approved them as presented.

COMPENSATION PROGRAM REPORT

Carol Morgan presented the Compensation report for December 2023. A total of 31 regular claims were received, compared to 35 the previous December. A total of 16 sexual assault (SA) claims were received, which was the same amount received the previous December. Year-to-date, regular claims had increased slightly, by 2 claims (0.85 %) compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year. Year-to-date SA claims had increased by 24 claims (24.74 %) compared to the same period in the prior fiscal year.

The largest compensation expenses for December 2023 were related to Domestic Assault, followed by Homicide and Aggravated Assault. Year-to-date, compensation expenses for regular claims were about \$6,500 less in the current fiscal year (FY24) than at the same point in the previous fiscal year (FY23). Year-to-date SA expenses were approximately \$18,000 less than at the same point in the prior fiscal year. The Compensation Report was accepted as presented.

RESTITUTION UNIT REPORT

Michelle Pelletier presented the Restitution Unit (RU) reports for December 2023. A total of 80 Restitution Judgement Orders (RJOs) were received from around the state, with the largest number by far (47) coming from Rutland County, which was much higher than usual for that county. Michelle

explained that those 47 RJOs were related to 8 offenders who each had multiple RJOs. December collections by the RU's Case Managers were a little over \$47K, which was notable since collections usually decrease in December. Michelle noted that this December's collections were also the highest monthly amount collected since December 2019. Another \$568.00 came in via tax offsets. The Restitution Report was accepted as presented.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Carol Brochu presented the Financial Report through December 2023. At halfway through the current state fiscal year (SFY24), revenues were slightly less than at the same point in the previous fiscal year. CCVS had received a small increase in the surcharge to the Compensation Fund. The DV/SV Fund also had an increase in the surcharge and marriage license fees. Carol noted that the cash balances in the Victims Compensation Fund and Restitution Fund were doing well in FY24. CCVS was not seeing the increased revenues that the state's Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) had expected. At this point, CCVS was projecting a deficit at the end of SFY24 in both special funds: the Compensation Fund and the DV/SV Fund. The DV/SV Fund's cash balance was not meeting the current level of revenues needed to support the grants out in this state fiscal year. In about a week, CCVS would switch to using state funds rather than federal funds for compensation claims, which would result in a 75% federal reimbursement for state dollars spent in FY24.

CENTER UPDATE

Jennifer Poehlmann updated the Board on several issues. She advised that the Vermont legislature was taking on a lot of issues, including a proposal to eliminate "cash bail," along with expanding restorative justice efforts to in part address the significant backlog in the courts. She noted that Vermont's Community Justice Centers (CJCs) are largely staffed by volunteers and only a few CJCs receive funding for advocate positions. Jenn recently testified to the House Judiciary Committee on the need to better fund CJCs, noting that reforms can't happen without investing in victim services. Board member Susan Ide agreed with this concern, remarking that some volunteers receive no training, and need better support and education to do their work properly. She shared her opinion that cases involving interpersonal violence should be staffed by advocates and not volunteers.

Jenn was also focused on the Child Hearsay bill which she's worked on for approximately 15 years over her career. She was hopeful the bill would pass, as it would provide physically-abused children with the same protections in the criminal justice process as those provided to child victims of sexual assault. She noted that the VT Network Against Domestic and Sexual Assault was working on a bill to tax sales of guns and ammunition in the hopes of growing the DV/SV Fund.

Jenn advised that CCVS was expecting a decrease in federal VOCA (Victim of Crime Act) funding for the next fiscal year. Vermont's Joint Fiscal Office is once again charged with looking at the usage of special funds to support victim services and other programs, with one of the requests to enable the state to consider how Vermont funds core services, including Victims Compensation and Restitution.

MEETING ADJOURNED: Motion was made, seconded, and voted unanimously to adjourn.
Adjourned at 3:00 PM.

Next VCCVS Board Meeting Date:
Monday, February 12, 2024 - 1:30 PM
In the conference room at 60 South
Main Street, Waterbury.