



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 2/25/2025

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): District Attorney

Staff Name and Phone Number: Shane Lewis 565-3150 / Tatiana Lopez 565-2822

Vote Requirement: 4/5th

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

California Governor's Office of Emergency Services Unserved/Underserved Victim Advocacy and Outreach Program

Recommended Action:

Execute a contract with the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services for the Unserved/Underserved Victim Advocacy and Outreach Program.

- A) Adopt a Resolution authorizing the District Attorney or designee to execute a contract with the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services to accept the award in the amount of \$196,906 for the term January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025. (Majority)
- B) Adopt a Resolution to amend the Department Allocation List extending the 1.0 FTE time-limited Victim Witness Advocate II position through March 31, 2026, to support this program, effective February 25, 2025. Extending the position beyond the grant term will allow for continuity in the program in the event that grant renewal notification is delayed as it has been in the past. (4/5th)

Executive Summary:

Board approval and authorization is requested to allow the District Attorney or designee to sign a contract to participate in the Unserved/Underserved Victim Advocacy and Outreach Program funded by the State of California, Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for \$196,906 from January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025. The program is supported through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Victim Assistance Formula Grant Program. Approval is also requested to extend the Victim Witness Advocate II position through March 31, 2026.

The objective of the Unserved/Underserved Victim Advocacy and Outreach (UV) Program is to provide culturally appropriate direct services to victims of crime who are immigrants, increase outreach and education to immigrant communities, raise awareness of available services, and strengthen understanding of the criminal justice system.

Discussion:

The UV program is comprised of five one-year awards that were first granted in January 2023 and funding is expected to continue through December 2027, despite recent and anticipated cuts in overall VOCA funding. First-year funding was awarded through a competitive process, and each subsequent application is non-competitive. This grant enables the District Attorney's Office Victim Services Division (VSD) to increase its

capacity to provide trauma-informed, culturally appropriate services for immigrants that meet their holistic needs, providing funding for a 1.0 FTE time-limited Victim Witness Advocate II (UV Advocate), currently allocated through March 31, 2025, dedicated to serving victims who are immigrants and collaborating with immigrant-serving organizations. The UV Advocate, hired in July 2023, has worked to strengthen relationships with community-based organizations that serve immigrant populations to better understand and respond to the unique needs of immigrant victims. Annual salary and benefit cost of the UV Advocate is estimated to be \$145,748 and is fully covered with grant funds. The grant term ends on December 31, 2025, and is expected to be renewed for a new one-year term in 2026. Due to delays in the renewal process, we have requested to extend the position to March 31, 2026. Funding for the 2026 grant term will be included in the FY2025/2026 State Budget, allowing sufficient time to seek opportunities for alternative funding to retain the position in the event the contract is not renewed.

Based on the most current census information available, immigrants represent nearly 17% of the County's 481,812 residents, including an estimated 41,900 who are undocumented. A significant number of the County's immigrants live in Santa Rosa, where the Latino population is concentrated in regions that experience high crime rates for youth violent crime, narcotics crime, gang crime, and child abuse and neglect. The almost 42,500 immigrant women are at particular risk of victimization since immigrant women experience abuse at rates almost three times the national average. Immigrants in low-wage jobs, such as the thousands of vineyard workers in the County, are at risk of labor violations and physical and sexual abuse. It is difficult to document the full extent of victimization because the District Attorney staff and law enforcement do not ask about a person's immigration status and immigrants report crimes at lower rates. Efforts to respond to the unique needs of the county's immigrant population are supported by the Board of Supervisors as demonstrated by the resolution adopted on January 10, 2025, to safeguard the civil rights of all Sonoma County residents, regardless of immigration status.

Eighty-five percent of the County's immigrants speak a language other than English at home and 55.5% speak English less than "very well." Eighteen percent of the foreign-born population lives below 150% of the poverty level, compared to nine percent countywide. The most common countries of origin include Mexico, the Philippines, and China. Community partners also report a significant Mixtec (indigenous migrants from Mexico) population who speak indigenous languages and are often isolated from other Latino populations.

Immigrant victims face unique forms of abuse, especially individuals who are undocumented or whose legal status depends on an abuser. Victims may be isolated, prevented from learning English or speaking with friends and family in their home country. Cultural stigma around victimization in some communities means that immigrants may be less likely to seek help. Some immigrants are not familiar with the laws and their rights in the United States, lack an understanding of the justice-seeking process, and mistrust the justice system. A fear of deportation means undocumented immigrants are even less likely to report crimes. The UV advocate position is specifically designed to establish trust by developing relationships through attending community events and outreach with partner agencies. The UV advocate provides a safe connection for victims who might otherwise not come forward to report crime and assist in the prosecution.

The Sonoma County Immigration Initiative launched in 2017, identified service needs based on input from immigrant communities, which included the need for specialized educational materials and outreach efforts, and better coordinated services. Through the Unserved/Underserved Victim Advocacy and Outreach Program (UV), the Victim Services Division of the District Attorney's Office continues to develop and strengthen

relationships with immigrant-serving agencies and build connections between these agencies and other service providers. VSD has shared information about new services available through the UV program with all partners and teams, and continues to promote coordinated efforts to conduct outreach, improve access, and provide services to better address the needs of immigrants and encourage reporting of crime.

Established by the County Board of Supervisors in 2020, the Office of Equity develops and delivers equity focused training curriculum for County departments and supports equity-centered planning. The UV Advocate will coordinate with the Office of Equity to seek and analyze relevant data and develop specific strategies and interventions to ensure culturally responsive services. In 2023, the Office of Equity dedicated staff to provide a one-day equity-focused training to the District Attorney VSD staff and, while budget limitations may not allow for a full-day program, we plan to collaborate again in 2025.

The UV Advocate is trained to provide intervention and an immediate response to victims who are in crisis. Cases may come to the attention of the advocate through reports to local law enforcement agencies that are referred to the District Attorney's Office, or by contacts reaching out on behalf of a victim. The Advocate assists with referrals for immediate needs to relevant support and links victims to ongoing, comprehensive care as well as to resources within the legal system for criminal prosecution and victim restitution. Victims of domestic violence or sexual assault are referred to the YWCA and Verity for additional crisis intervention services. Counseling partner Humanidad Therapy & Education Services has provided culturally sensitive bilingual therapy services in Sonoma County for 10 years. VSD will continue to refer victims to Humanidad for culturally sensitive individual counseling. The provision of culturally competent mental health services is critical for serving immigrant victims because culture affects whether and how people seek help, how they cope with symptoms, the presence and quality of social supports, and how they impart meaning to their symptoms.

Providing education about the criminal justice process and support services to the many underserved populations that make up the immigrant community is vital to ensuring access and halting the cycle of violence. VSD will continue to increase outreach and education to immigrant communities through this program, to build trust, raise awareness of available services, and increase understanding of the criminal justice system. A critical first step to providing culturally sensitive services is to build trusting relationships. VSD will continue to consult with the Office of Equity and immigrant-serving organizations, including Petaluma Health Center, Alliance Medical Center, Latino Service Providers, California Human Development, and Catholic Charities to develop a plan to conduct outreach that uses trusted messengers to reach a population that is understandably wary of public institutions.

VSD will also produce informational materials in multiple languages with information about victims' rights and available services. VSD will distribute these materials to partner agencies, including community-based organizations and first responders such as law enforcement and medical providers. The role of the advocate is to support victims in court and help them understand the prosecutorial process, assist in navigating resources available in the community and providing referrals, provide assistance with compensation through the California Victim Compensation Board and/or court ordered restitution, stay in contact with victims throughout the prosecutorial process to provide updates, to help victims remain safe by assisting with protective orders or shelter, and provide translation services when needed. The UV advocate is currently working with victims in approximately 120 open cases in various stages of the prosecutorial process, however that does not comprise the entire caseload. Advocates often continue to work with victims after the

conclusion of a case, particularly if there is an appeal or a request by the defendant for post-conviction relief; and advocates assist victims in cases that are referred to the District Attorney but not filed, or cases where a suspect is not known. The advocate also is assigned to an average of seven new cases per week.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

On March 26, 2024 the Board of Supervisors approved the acceptance of grant funds from the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services for renewal of the Unserved/Underserved Victims Advocacy and Outreach Program.

On March 14, 2023, the Board of Supervisors approved the acceptance of grant funds from the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services to fund the Unserved/Underserved Victim Advocacy and Outreach Program.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY24-25 Adopted	FY25-26 Projected	FY26-27 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$196,906	\$196,906	\$196,906
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$196,906	\$196,906	\$196,906
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal	\$196,906	\$196,906	\$196,906
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$196,906	\$196,906	\$196,906

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

This grant is awarded on a calendar year basis, therefore funds from the 2024 CalOES award were budgeted between FY2023/2024 and FY2024/2025; The 2025 CalOES award of \$196,906 will be portioned between FY 2024/2025 and FY 2025/2026 budgets. The revenue and appropriations for the funds to be utilized in FY

Agenda Date: 2/25/2025

2025/2026 will be included as part of budget development. Grant funds for the 2025 calendar year have been accepted by CalOES and are not at risk in the event of a federal funding freeze.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)
Victim Services Advocate II	\$6,511.81 - \$7,915.40	0 <input type="checkbox"/>	0 <input type="checkbox"/>

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

The time-limited UV Advocate is dedicated to serving victims who are immigrants, collaborating with immigrant-serving organizations, making referrals as necessary and appropriate, and will continue to provide outreach and education to immigrant communities.

The end date of the grant-funded Victim Witness Advocate II will be March 31, 2026, which will allow the position to continue beyond the contract’s expiration in order to accommodate common contract renewal delays. Funding for the 2026 grant term will be included in the FY2025/2026 State Budget, allowing sufficient time to seek alternative funding to support the position in the event the contract is not renewed.

Attachments:

- Resolution A - Grant Acceptance
- Resolution B - Position Resolution
- Grant Award Document

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A