



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 12/5/2023

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): District Attorney

Staff Name and Phone Number: Shane Lewis 565-3150/Marsha Lucien 565-8257

Vote Requirement: 4/5th

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Grant to Improve the Criminal Justice Response

Recommended Action:

Authorize the District Attorney to enter into an agreement with United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women for the Grant to Improve the Criminal Justice Response.

- A. Adopt a resolution authorizing the District Attorney to execute a contract with the United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women to accept the award in the amount of \$575,000 for the term October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2026.
- B. Adopt a resolution adding a 0.5 FTE time-limited Victim Witness Advocate II position to the department allocation table through December 31, 2026.
- C. Adopt a resolution authorizing adjustment to the Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Adopted Budget necessary to appropriate these grant funds totaling \$152,425 (4/5th vote)

Executive Summary:

Board approval is requested to allow the District Attorney to enter into an agreement to participate in the United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Grant to Improve the Criminal Justice Response. The total amount of the award is \$575,000 and the term of the grant is from October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2026.

The purpose of this grant is to continue improving the criminal justice response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. This project will be implemented throughout Sonoma County. Specific activities include: 1) establishing a Domestic Violence High Risk Team and developing governing bylaws based on promising practices and models; 2) establishing policies and procedures for communication and information sharing between multidisciplinary partners, including law enforcement, prosecution, probation, and the courts; 3) developing a countywide protocol for handling high-risk cases from multiple entry points across disciplines; 4) coordinating and implementing lethality assessment trainings for multidisciplinary partners informed by best practices and lessons learned; 5) implementing trainings for multidisciplinary partners, to understand the threat posed by high-risk offenders; 6) developing resource pamphlets in English and Spanish with information about the warning signs for domestic violence homicide; 7) developing pocket resource books for law enforcement encounters with victims; 8) preparing informational for the judiciary about the danger of high-risk offenders; and 9) providing legal services to survivors.

Discussion:

The Improving Criminal Justice Responses (ICJR) is a competitive grant program designed to encourage partnership among state and local law enforcement agencies, courts, and victim services providers to improve the criminal justice response to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. The primary goal is to seek safety and autonomy for victims. In 2016, the District Attorney's Office was awarded an ICJR grant which was used to improve services and support for the underserved Spanish-speaking population in Sonoma County. Through this program and in conjunction with community partners, the Family Justice Center Sonoma County (FJCSC) was able to expand bilingual services available to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and significantly increased the number of survivors seeking assistance at the FJCSC. The 2023 ICJR program funds will be used to work with local law enforcement and service provider partners to create a Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT) to address the increase in number of Domestic Violence homicides in the County.

Sonoma County is home to many diverse communities, including traditionally underserved populations that are at higher risk of domestic violence (DV) and dating violence. Immigrants represent 17% of the County's population, and almost 42,500 immigrant women reside in the county. 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." An estimated 38,500 undocumented immigrants reside in the County. Abuse rates are almost three times higher than the national average among immigrant women. Sonoma County is also home to one of the country's largest LGBTQ communities, with an estimated 7.63 gay couples per 1,000 households. Within the LGBTQ community, transgender people and bisexual women face the most alarming rates of sexual violence; 44% of lesbians, 61% of bisexual women, and 54% of transgender and non-binary individuals experienced DV compared to 35% of straight women. More than one third of the clients served at the FJCSC each year are individuals with disabilities, including many who are deaf or hard of hearing. Individuals with disabilities are at greater risk of experiencing DV and sexual assault (SA) than non-disabled individuals. While the proposed project will endeavor to serve all residents, partners will make special efforts to reach and serve members from these traditionally underserved communities.

The FJCSC provides coordinated and comprehensive supportive services to victims of DV, SA, dating violence, stalking, and other related crimes. With previous funding from the Improving Criminal Justice Responses (ICJR) grant program, the FJCSC and its partners have significantly strengthened the criminal justice response to these crimes. However, given the startling number of DV homicides in the County, there is an urgent need to reexamine and strengthen the collaborative response to identifying high-risk victims and connecting them to services to reduce future DV homicides. This project will build on a rich history of collaborative service delivery in Sonoma County by expanding the capacity of FJCSC partners to identify high-risk victims and their offenders, create a prioritized service track for these victims, and hold their offenders accountable. This approach will require greater coordination and communication sharing between multidisciplinary partners through a Domestic Violence High Risk Team.

Law enforcement agencies and nonprofit partners across the county conduct various lethality and danger assessments to determine the potential risk for victims of DV; however, these assessments are not conducted consistently, and first responders do not always have the information and training they need to connect victims that they identify as high-risk to potentially life-saving services. Additionally, the information gleaned

from these assessments often remains siloed within the respective agency. Victims who are flagged as high-risk by law enforcement need immediate crisis assistance and ongoing comprehensive services that are tailored to meet their needs, such as case management, civil legal assistance, and immigration services. Crisis services are currently available through the 24-hour Crisis Hotline and the FJCSC, however, the FJCSC's current staffing model does not support long term and directed case management for these high-risk clients and FJCSC partners do not have sufficient capacity to provide specialized and prioritized services without additional resources.

A known gap in current services is that service providers will not contact victims who score high on law enforcement-conducted lethality assessments unless the victim has signed a consent to be contacted. Unfortunately, this barrier had tragic consequences. In 2020, a victim was killed after previously scoring high on the lethality assessment but was never contacted by victim service providers because they had not signed the consent form. Sonoma County has a Death Review Team to review DV homicides and determine how the local service providers and law enforcement could have prevented the crime; however this team only meets after the victim has slipped through the cracks in the system. There is a need for more effective and intentional coordination to prevent these tragedies before they happen, including proactively identifying and intervening, improving information sharing, providing ongoing monitoring and management of identified high-risk cases, referring victims to appropriate services, and holding high-risk offenders accountable.

Through this program, the Family Justice Center will establish a Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT) to enable regular and intentional coordination on high-risk cases to keep victims safe. The FJCSC will coordinate with criminal justice and victim service providers to standardize protocols for using evidence-based danger and lethality assessments, implement training, and share resources to build greater capacity to identify high-risk individuals and refer them to services. Victims identified as high-risk will be assigned a high-risk Case Manager that will provide specialized case management and use the full weight of the County's Coordinated Community Response team to promote each victim's safety, including victim advocacy and comprehensive services at the FJCSC such as civil legal assistance and immigration assistance. The FJCSC will establish a prioritized service track to ensure the needs of high-risk victims are met with urgency. As a result of training, use of evidence-based risk assessments, and improved information sharing, the DVHRT will be able to make more informed decisions to manage high-risk offenders such as requesting enhanced bail, GPS monitoring, and potential use of criminal enhancements when filing charges, and prioritizing probation supervision for high-risk offenders to monitor for warning signs.

The DVHRT members include the District Attorney's Office (including representation from prosecution, Victim Services Division, and Family Justice Center Sonoma County), Sonoma County Sheriff, Santa Rosa Police Department, Probation, and a non-profit victim services agency, Victims Empowerment support Team (VEST). Additional partner agencies include Legal Aid of Sonoma County, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, Child Protective Services, Batterer Intervention Services, and rape crisis center partner, Verity. The DVHRT will be guided by four evidence-based principles: 1) Early identification of high-risk cases through a validated risk assessment tool; 2) Engagement of a multidisciplinary team to cross-share important information regarding the case; 3) Ongoing monitoring and management of identified cases; and 4) Individualizing services to victims along with accountability for offenders.

The Navigator (Victim Witness Advocate II) will be the coordinator of the project, working with the Family Justice Center Executive Director to establish a multidisciplinary Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT)

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and will coordinate with criminal justice and victim services providers to implement standardized protocols for using evidence-based danger and lethality assessments, implementing training, and sharing resources to build capacity to identify high-risk individuals and refer them to services. This 0.50 FTE position will be fully funded by the grant project. The Navigator will be working at the Family Justice Center and in partnership with law enforcement and the DVHRT and utilize validated assessment tools, including the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) as encouraged by state law, to identify high-risk individuals and implement the standardized protocols to keep victims safe. In addition to acting as the project coordinator, the Navigator will assist in safety planning as well as recording information regarding metrics for the program for reporting to Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Racial Equity:

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

No

Prior Board Actions:

The Board approved the acceptance of the Office on Violence Against Women: Improving Criminal Justice Response Program for 2019 grant program on October 22, 2019 and the 2016 program on November 1, 2016.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY23-24 Adopted	FY24-25 Projected	FY25-26 Projected
Budgeted Expenses		\$189,918	\$191,682
Additional Appropriation Requested	\$152,425		
Total Expenditures	\$152,425	\$189,918	\$191,682
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal	\$152,425	\$189,918	\$191,682
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$152,425	\$189,918	\$191,682

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Improving Criminal Justice Responses Grant program is a three-year Federal Fiscal Year program with funds of \$575,000 split among FY2023-24 (Q2, Q3, and Q4), FY 2024-25, and FY 2025-26, and the remaining \$40,975 will be spent in the first quarter of FY 2026-27. No local match is required for this project.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)
Victim Witness Advocate II	6,231 - 7,572	0.5	0

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

The addition of a 0.50 FTE Victim Witness Advocate time-limited position will be funded by the ICJR program. The navigator will be the coordinator of the project to establish a multidisciplinary DVHRT and to implement standardized protocols for the use of evidence-based danger and lethality assessments. They will focus on connecting with victims of domestic violence who are from underserved communities and are identified as high-risk and are considered to be in extreme danger if not connected to appropriate services to secure safety.

The end date of the grant-funded Victim Witness Advocate will be December 31, 2026 which will allow the position to continue beyond the contract's expiration in order to participate in final grant reporting and review of metrics collected throughout the grant term, and to accommodate common contract renewal delays. In the event that the contract is not renewed beyond September 30, 2026, the non-grant funded position costs from October 2026 through December 2026 would be paid with salary savings by the department or fund balance.

Attachments:

- Resolution A - Award Acceptance
- Resolution B - Position Allocation
- Resolution C - Budget Adjustment
- Grant Award Document

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A