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An Overview of Victim Services in South Carolina

INTRODUCTION

We conducted this follow-up review to determine the extent to which recommendations presented in our 2007 report, *An Overview of Victim Services in South Carolina*, have been implemented. In our 2007 report we identified agencies involved in providing victim services, examined the administrative structure for the provision of victim services, and compared South Carolina's victim services structure to those in other states. We made 11 recommendations — 5 to the General Assembly, 5 to the State Office of Victim Assistance (SOVA) and 1 to the South Carolina Court Administration. These recommendations addressed the Victim Advocate Policy Committee, victim services grants, victim notification, and internal controls.

During our follow-up we determined that the agencies implemented four of six recommendations. The General Assembly did not implement any of the legislative recommendations. There have also been two significant victim services developments in South Carolina. The General Assembly enacted legislation creating the Office of Victim Services Education and Certification (OVSEC) in the Crime Victims' Ombudsman Office. OVSEC provides oversight of training, education, and certification of victim assistance programs. According to an agency official, a standardized certification program should improve services to victims, because victim services providers will have a baseline of training. In addition, the Department of Corrections (SCDC) received a federal grant to improve victim notification in South Carolina. SCDC has used the grant to implement a system that would notify victims of the status of offenders in the custody of county detention centers, some city jails, SCDC, and the Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services.

RECOMMENDATIONS & CURRENT STATUS

1. *The General Assembly should dissolve the Victim Advocate Policy Committee, determine which of its functions remain necessary, and transfer those responsibilities to the Victim Services Coordinating Council or the Commission on Prosecution Coordination.*

This recommendation has not been implemented. The General Assembly did not dissolve the Victim Advocate Policy Committee. Since release of the LAC overview in March 2007, the committee has met once, in January 2009.

2. *The State Office of Victim Assistance, in consultation with the Victim Services Coordinating Council should examine the grants made by the Department of Public Safety, The Department of Health and Environmental Control and the Department of Social Services to determine if the grants could be consolidated under one agency and recommend statutory changes to the General Assembly.*

This recommendation has not been implemented. SOVA and the Victim Services Coordinating Council have not examined the grants to determine whether they could be consolidated, and neither SOVA nor the council have recommended statutory changes to the General Assembly. The Victim Services Coordinating Council did place this recommendation on its tentative list of priorities, but it was not chosen as a priority for FY 07-08.

3. *The State Office of Victim Assistance, in consultation with the Victim Service Coordinating Council, should develop procedures to improve coordination among all agencies to ensure that all victims are notified and all agencies receive victim impact statements as required by law.*

This recommendation has been implemented. The Victim Services Coordinating Council, of which SOVA is a member, expects the certification system for victim services providers to improve coordination because all providers will be informed of the proper procedures related to victim notification and victim impact statements.

4. *The State Office of Victim Assistance, in consultation with the Victim Service Coordinating Council, should determine the feasibility of creating a statewide automated victim notification system.*

This recommendation has been implemented. SOVA participates on the governance committee responsible for implementing a statewide automated victim information and notification system (SAVIN). The new system will include the Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services which was using a manual system, as well as many of the state's county detention facilities. However, there will still not be a single statewide system. The Department of Juvenile Justice will continue to use the Internet Victim Information System (IVIS). According to DJJ officials, the University of South Carolina provides IVIS at no cost to the agency.

5. *The General Assembly should amend the assessment audit proviso in subsequent appropriations acts to require that the Office of the State Auditor notify the State Office of Victim Assistance and South Carolina Court Administration of all completed court audit reports.*
6. *The General Assembly should amend the assessment audit proviso in subsequent appropriations acts to allow input from the State Office of Victim Assistance, the State Treasurer's Office and South Carolina Court Administration in the audit selection process. If no input is received, a random selection process should be used.*

These recommendations have not been implemented. The General Assembly did not amend the assessment audit proviso to require the recommended notifications by the Office of the State Auditor (state auditor) or to allow audit selection input from SOVA and South Carolina Court Administration. However, according to a SOVA official, the state auditor has added SOVA to a distribution list, emailing them the completed court audits. Both SOVA and state auditor officials stated that each office has internal procedures to address reports of potential violations. However, the state auditor does not use those allegations to determine which courts should be prioritized for audit. Rather, the state auditor forwards the allegations to the Office of the State Treasurer, because that department can immediately address the allegations. According to an agency official, the state auditor has received few allegations of violations and has ultimately audited those local governments.

This follow-up was limited to the issues in the 2007 audit for which we made recommendations. We received information from relevant agencies regarding the implementation of the recommendations in the audit. We reviewed this and other information, and verified evidence supporting the agency information as appropriate. A copy of the original report is available on our website or upon request.

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7. *The General Assembly should authorize the State Office of Victim Assistance and South Carolina Court Administration to follow up to ensure that deficiencies found in court audits are corrected.*
8. *The General Assembly should authorize the State Office of Victim Assistance to conduct programmatic reviews of victim services agencies.*

These recommendations have not been implemented. Although the state auditor is required to contact SOVA and Court Administration regarding deficiencies related to those agencies, the General Assembly has not authorized SOVA to follow up and require correction of the deficiencies. Also, the General Assembly did not authorize SOVA to conduct programmatic reviews of victim services agencies. However during this follow-up review, the House of Representatives adopted an amendment to the FY 09-10 appropriations bill, which would authorize SOVA to perform the recommended programmatic reviews. In addition, SOVA recently created a position to conduct programmatic reviews of Solicitor-based victim services programs.

9. *The State Office of Victim Assistance, in consultation with the South Carolina Victim Service Coordinating Council, should develop and distribute guidelines for the appropriate expenditure of victim services funds.*

This recommendation has been implemented. SOVA has developed and distributed guidelines for the appropriate expenditure of victim services funds. According to an agency official, SOVA sends the guidelines to all victim services providers and also to others upon request.

10. *The State Office of Victim Assistance should develop a standardized format for the supplementary schedules in consultation with the South Carolina Victim Service Coordinating Council, the Office of the State Auditor, the State Treasurer's Office, and South Carolina Court Administration.*

This recommendation has not been implemented. SOVA did not develop a standardized format for the supplementary schedules. According to a SOVA official, the information provided in a completed schedule is adequate, and the issue is the failure of organizations' accountants to prepare the schedules.

11. *South Carolina Court Administration should provide adequate and appropriate training regarding supplementary schedules detailing fines and assessments collected at the court level.*

The recommendation has been implemented. South Carolina Court Administration continues to release an annual memo to court staff detailing changes in fine and assessment formulas. Also, according to an agency official, they have increased the focus on the supplementary schedules in each training they conduct.